

FROM CAPTIVITY TO PLACEMENT: RE-EXAMINING THE INDIAN STUDENT
PLACEMENT PROGRAM, 1947-2000

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis investigates the Indian Student Placement Program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which removed tens of thousands of Native students from their families and placed them in white LDS homes during the latter half of the twentieth century. I argue that greater attention to the LDS past and the historical context of Indigenous child removal reframes the program as a settler colonial effort, which distanced placement students from their Indigeneity. Despite this, Native people turned placement to their own ends, simultaneously maximizing the program's benefits while minimizing its harms. Today, the LDS Church and its settler membership hardly discuss placement, opting instead for a whitewashed, selective memory of the past. Yet, for better or worse—probably worse—placement played a significant role in the history of Indigenous North America and the church in the twentieth century. It must not be forgotten.

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I: INTRODUCTION

Between 1947 and 2000, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) removed an estimated 40,000 to 70,000 Indigenous children from their communities across the United States and Canada in order to place them in the homes of white church members.¹ This removal program went by many names, but historians remember it by the most common one—the Indian Student Placement Program (ISPP).² As their stated goal, the Latter-day Saints hoped to offer the youth “social, educational, cultural, spiritual, and leadership opportunities” that removal advocates argued Indigenous children could not access in their natal communities.³ In the process, members of the church renewed their

¹ Estimates vary widely on the number of students who participated in the ISPP and are difficult to resolve, in part because the church’s official figures are fragmented and currently unavailable for research. Additionally, the church did not usually record so-called ‘unofficial’ placements, where Indigenous students were illegally removed by missionaries or other lay LDS members without any official church oversight. The official statistics, even if they were available to researchers, would therefore likely understate the program’s total numbers. The upper limit of 70,000 children comes from a 1983 estimate by Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, in *America’s Saints: The Rise of Mormon Power* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1985), 163. The historian Matthew Garrett seems to have taken the most complete survey of the figures available in the church archives and projects between 48,000 to 62,000 placement participants over the program’s half-century of operation. See Garrett, *Making Lamanites: Mormons, Native Americans, and the Indian Student Placement Program, 1947-2000* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 251. For the lower numbers, though they are frequently cited, I have been unable to find an origin in the program’s fragmented records or even an official’s best guess.

² Other names for the LDS child removal project included the “outing program” (presumably named after the Carlisle Indian Industrial School’s summer placement program, discussed in chapter 1), the “Boarding Care Program,” the Indian Student Placement Service, the Lamanite Placement Program, and the Lamanite Placement Service.

³ This is the slogan that was touted to both white LDS and Navajo communities alike—it appears in several placement films and many newspaper articles in Utah about the placement program. It seems that the phrase comes from an undated “Policies Regarding Requirements and Responsibilities,” prepared by the Indian Student Placement Program, probably created in the early 1960s. See Clarence R. Bishop, “Indian Placement: A History of the Indian Student Placement Program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” Master’s thesis, University of Utah, 1967, 103, 1967, Americana Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library (HBL), Provo, Utah. This statement of objectives was sometimes expanded to include “leadership abilities.” For an early example of newspapers citing this objective, see “Indian Students Absorbe [sic] White Man Education,” *Davis County Clipper*, November 20, 1964.

commitment to remove Native children, drawing from earlier experiences during the colonial era when settler Saints had purchased and indentured enslaved Indigenous children, from 1850 until roughly 1890. In the second era—placement in the twentieth century—individual Saints and church officials carried out these informal and often illegal “adoptions” in secret until 1954, when the LDS Women’s Relief Society obtained an official state license to place Indian children. Thus, the 1947 “outing program” that had gained quasi-official, clandestine sanction from the church’s General Authorities had by the early 1970s morphed into a sprawling, bureaucratized movement that removed thousands of Indigenous children annually. Participants hailed from at least 63 Indigenous communities from across the United States and Canada, though more than half of the participants were Diné (or Navajos).⁴ The children lived just about anywhere that a substantial white, LDS majority community could be found—in Utah, Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, British Columbia, Alberta, and even the state of Georgia.⁵ Indigenous students in the

⁴ Bishop, “Indian Placement,” 77-78; David A. Albrecht, interviewed by James B. Allen, September 3, 1992, in Allen, “The Rise and Decline of the LDS Indian Student Placement Program, 1947-1996,” in Davis Bitton, ed., *Mormon Scriptures and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson* (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Mormon Research, 1998), 115, footnote 27. The available archival records and early secondary literature rarely identify the Indigenous communities that students came from, reflecting a broader tendency of placement officials and church leaders to see Indigenous people in racial or monolithic terms—as “Lamanites” with a single culture different from the Mormon “white culture.” The failure to record national and tribal identities makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive list of all the communities that participants identified with, though I try to mention their national or tribal affiliation whenever possible in this thesis. See Appendix 1 of this thesis for an inexhaustive list of Indigenous communities that placement participants came from, which was originally published in Bishop’s 1967 Master’s thesis (before the program had even reached its 1973 apogee in student enrollment). Despite the paucity of records on participating Indigenous communities, the records reveal the general location that children were removed from. Placement participants came from Utah, California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Oregon, Idaho, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Montana, Texas, Minnesota, the Carolinas, the Dakotas, Alaska, British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. See Figure 1 on the following page for an image that explores most of the ISPP’s general child removal and placement patterns in the 1970s.

⁵ “Flip Chart Presentation”, circa 1970, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints History Library (CHL), Salt Lake City, Utah.

program spent nine months away from their families and returned home for three months in the summer (two if they were placed in Canada). The program expanded rapidly until its zenith in 1973, after which it declined almost as swiftly, under pressure from Indigenous critics and activists who fought to end Indigenous child removal movements with the passage of the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

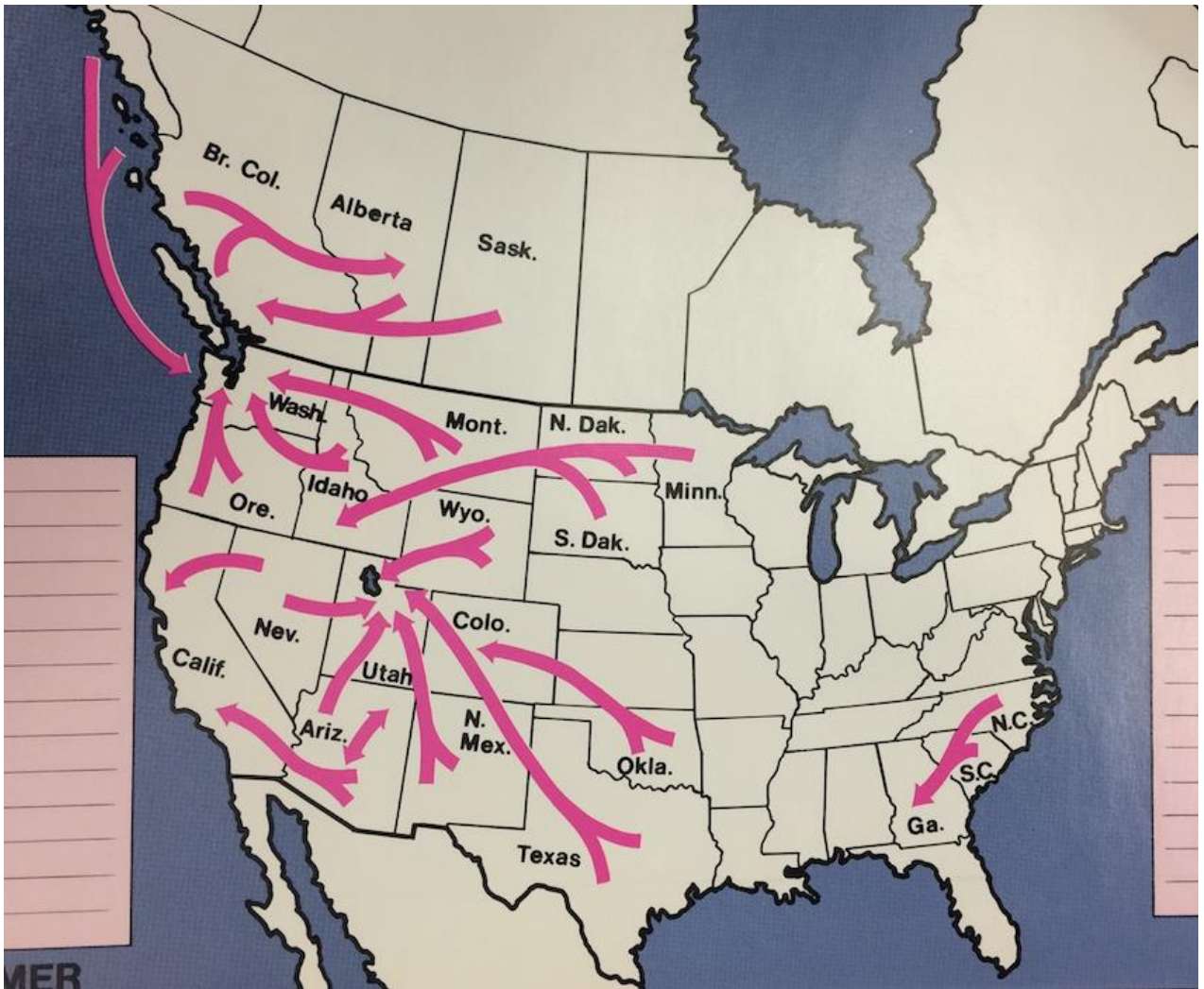


Figure 1. “Flip Chart Presentation: Indian Student Placement Program,” circa 1970, 118866, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints History Library (CHL), Salt Lake City, Utah.

According to church teachings over the placement program's existence, it was the duty of white Mormons to expose Indigenous people to LDS beliefs so that they might "blossom as the rose."⁶ Church teachings about the origins of Indigenous people considered them to be descendants of the "Lamanites," an ancient Israelite tribe that had been cursed by God with a "skin of blackness."⁷ Church leaders remarked not only that their program performed not only the crucial duty of cultural, spiritual, and economic uplift for Native people, but also that the skin of participants physically whitened as a result of their time in the program, which church leaders saw as the fulfillment of prophecy.

Through the placement program, the church attempted to redefine Native identity by encouraging participants to see themselves as "Lamanites," and some did, despite the racist and paternalist connotations the word carries for other Indian members in the church community. To this day, some Native Latter-day Saints continue to take pride in and self-identify with the "Lamanite" category, even as the church has abandoned its "Lamanite programs" and distanced itself from earlier teachings.⁸ But not all participants internalized the church's version of history. In fact, most placement participants abandoned the program before graduating from it.

⁶ Elise Boxer, "The Lamanites Shall Blossom as the Rose: The Indian Student Placement Program, Mormon Whiteness, and Indigenous Identity," *Journal of Mormon History* 41 no. 4 (2015): 132-176.

⁷ 2 Ne. 30:6.

⁸ In 1981, the church revised the Book of Mormon, prophesying that the Lamanites would become "pure and delightsome" instead of "white and delightsome" (2 Nephi 30:6). Douglas Campbell asserts that the change reflected the First Presidency's discovery that Joseph Smith intended to change the book's promise to Lamanites from "white" to "pure" in 1840. See Campbell, "'White' or 'Pure': Five Vignettes," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 4 (1996): 119-135. In any case, the church's revelation that its scripture did not really claim that Native people would turn white seemed a convenient one in 1981, as the placement program entered its long nadir. In 2013, the church backed off even farther, as the introduction to the Book of Mormon was changed to identify the Lamanites as "among the ancestors of the Native Americans," rather than "the principal ancestors of the American Indians."

For those who remained, the program's insistence that students live in "two worlds"—one Indian, one white—caused participants to feel out of place in both communities. Program graduates returned home to reservations and nations with white LDS value systems and expectations that made life more—not less—challenging. As one participant recalled, echoing many other accounts: "When people graduated and came back to the reservation, what was supposed to happen to the values [we] learned? I have more bad feelings than good; and nobody has the answers to those questions, no one knew how it would come out."⁹ Perhaps most destructively, the placement program distanced many participants from their Indigeneity. Just like boarding schools, placement contributed to language loss, cultural devastation, and the separation of Native families.

Though the church has closed many key placement statistics to research, it remains clear that a majority of program participants were Diné, also known as Navajos. The Diné have resided since time immemorial in their homeland, Diné Bikeyah, nestled in the four sacred mountains in the American Southwest. In 1863, the US government initiated a scorch and burn campaign to curb Confederate incursions into Indian Country and to address Native livestock raids, vowing to make the Navajos surrender or else to exterminate them. Then, beginning in 1864, soldiers captured tens of thousands of Diné, forcing them on "the Long Walk," where Navajo families marched hundreds of miles to a prison that they called Hwéeldi (which the government called Bosque Redondo, near Fort Sumner, New Mexico). For as many as four years, captive Diné starved as they subsisted on minimal government rations and what little corn they could grow. Despite the suffering, they never forgot their

⁹ Tona J. Hangen, "A Place to Call Home: Studying the Indian Placement Program," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30 no. 1 (1997): 54.

homeland. Their leaders signed a treaty with the federal government in 1868 that allowed them to return to Diné Bikeyah, where they reunited with Navajos who had evaded government capture and restored livestock herds decimated by war and imprisonment. For decades, the Diné led self-sufficient lives and spoke their own language, Diné bizaad, almost exclusively.¹⁰

A new threat to Diné lifeways emerged in the 1930s, as John Collier took over as the new director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Informed by New Dealer conservationists, Collier worried that livestock overgrazing was destroying the Navajo range, so he proposed a reduction strategy that butchered “excess” reservation animals in return for a sum of money. To Diné, their sheep, goats, and horses were not just a critical means of subsistence, but central to Diné conceptions of gender and self-identity. Diné women owned most of the nation’s sheep and nearly all the goats, and therefore exerted considerable autonomy in Navajo economic life and local politics. BIA agents who expected that the Navajo Nation’s all-male Council could legitimately sign off on their reduction plans would be bitterly disappointed when Navajos resisted their initiatives tirelessly; worse than that, the agents’ own patriarchal reasoning prevented them from seeing the need to work with Navajo women to implement policy in Diné Bikeyah. Despite his good intentions, Collier’s policy was a catastrophe. The ensuing effects of poverty and political disempowerment fell hardest on Diné women, who had concentrated their wealth and prestige in their sheep and goats.¹¹

¹⁰ Peter Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002); Jennifer Denetdale, “Chairmen, Presidents, and Princesses: the Navajo Nation, Gender, and the Politics of Tradition,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 21 (2006): 12-13.

¹¹ Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

Mormon placement initiatives followed on the heels of federal policy that impoverished Native families and diminished women's authority. This created a unique scenario in which some Navajos began to consider leaving Diné Bikéyah or permitted their children to leave. Thus, the 1940s also found many Navajos leaving the reservation, where poverty provided a disincentive to remain, just as the American war economy provided incentives to leave.¹²

After a drought and a tough winter in 1947, a young Navajo woman named Helen John stayed with a white LDS family in Richfield, Utah, in order to attend school.¹³ Historians widely credit this event as the unofficial beginning of placement, as the program operated illegally—without state or tribal permission to remove and place Indian children—for several years before the Relief Society took over with an official foster license in 1954. But beginning the story of placement with Helen John obscures the program's relationship to earlier child removal movements carried out by Mormons. This thesis instead situates the ISPP within the deeper context of the Mormon past and a broader history of Indigenous child removal. I argue that although placement joined a cohort of settler colonial removal programs designed to distance children from their Indigenous cultures, communities, and lands, Native people found ways to turn the program to their own uses, minimizing the ISPP's harms while maximizing its benefits. Placement should become a part of scholarly conversations on settler colonial education, just as scholarship on settler colonial education must reckon more seriously with placement.

¹² Garrett, *Making Lamanites*.

¹³ J. Neil Birch, "Helen John: The Beginnings of Indian Placement," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon History* 18, no. 4 (1977): 119-129.

So far, the only monograph concerning the ISPP is Matthew Garrett's *Making Lamanites*, which provides a useful overview of the program. Garrett explores the origins of the term "Lamanite," carefully detailing how LDS understandings of Native America inspired the church's efforts to redeem Indians with their placement program. He argues that many Native students embraced the term Lamanite "as a source of strength and opportunity," so that even as placement served as an assimilation tool, it also offered students real opportunities for personal and spiritual fulfillment.¹⁴ Rich in archival sources and Garrett's own oral history interviews with placement participants, the book serves as a valuable resource on placement.

There is little cross-pollination between studies of the Mormon program and the broader history of colonial education in the United States during the twentieth century. Though recent historians of placement like Elise Boxer and Margaret Jacobs have broken from this trend, earlier work on placement tended toward parochial studies, which emphasize the intentions of benevolent Mormons and assess the program as a "success" or "failure" within a white LDS value system.¹⁵ Since the last two decades have seen a blossoming of critical Mormon studies work in other areas, the prolonged silence on placement is disheartening. The church's own suppression of documents relating to Mormon-Indian relations and violence has played a significant role in this silence. After a slew of sexual assault cases filed by placement participants against the church, in 2018

¹⁴ Garrett, *Making Lamanites*, 8.

¹⁵ Allen, "The Rise and Decline"; Birch, "Helen John"; Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 82-84, 86-88; Bruce A. Chadwick, Stan L. Albrecht, and Howard M. Bahr, "Evaluation of a Student Placement Program," *Social Casework* 67, no. 9 (1986): 515-24. Mauss's pathbreaking *All Abraham's Children* considers placement's successes and failures mainly from a white Mormon perspective, but recognizes that this outsider perspective is only part of the story.

Brigham Young University placed a moratorium on pre-1967 church correspondence and other archival sources. It's hard to see this as anything but an effort to obscure the institution's less-than-saintly past. Historians, for the most part, have seemed content to look the other way.

As a case in point, the most frequently cited work on placement remains Clare Bishop's master's thesis, a 1968 document that he composed while directing the placement program. On the one hand, historians cannot easily divorce themselves from his account, since he reproduces so many valuable primary source documents and interviews that have now been lost or restricted. On the other, one would be grateful if historians would treat with deeper skepticism the claims of a man who later characterized contemporary Native Americans as belonging to "a culture of poverty. . . of alcoholism and drug abuse."¹⁶ Along a similar vein, the historian Jessie L. Embry has overseen the creation of an impressive number of oral history interviews with Native Americans about the LDS Church and placement program. She has written a useful article about the now-missing "Placement Host Families Oral History Project," which argues that historians should pay more attention to the perspectives and intentions of non-Indian "foster" families.¹⁷ Embry's summary of the project makes the argument that Native students brought hardships into their host's homes, which families weathered as a testament to their religious devotion and fundamentally benevolent intentions. Such a view occasionally obscures the critical context of child removal. Emblematic of this problem, Embry reports that Native children sexually abused

¹⁶ Clarence R. Bishop, interviewed by Lynette Riggs, in Riggs, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Indian Student Placement Service: A History" (PhD diss., Utah State University, 2008), 155.

¹⁷ Jessie L. Embry, "Indian Placement Program Host Families: A Mission to the Lamanites," *Journal of Mormon History* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 235-276.

non-Indian youth but does not mention that placement's power-laden structure and a lack of institutional oversight also put Native students in harm's way. In the article, Embry succeeds at communicating most host families' good intentions, but only discusses how outcome fell short of intention when white Mormons' interests were at stake.

The historian Elise Boxer's work has served as a necessary corrective to scholarship that has too often mistaken the colonial gaze for an objective one. Her article on race and the Indian Student Placement Program has drawn scholarly attention to Mormon beliefs that placement not only assimilated Indian children, but also caused them to *physically whiten* in fulfillment of Latter-day Saint prophecy.¹⁸ Critics argue Boxer's work promotes a "binary" view of evil Mormon colonizers and helpless Indian victims and that her work relies too heavily on theory.¹⁹ Such reductive mischaracterizations make a stronger case for the field's fundamental problems than the weaknesses of Boxer's scholarship. Though theoretically informed by settler colonialism, Boxer's writings feature complex explorations of power rooted in thorough archival research. I eagerly await her forthcoming monograph on placement and "Lamanites."

Much of the best scholarship on placement to date comes from those who were not formally trained as historians. Lynette Riggs has contributed a valuable voice on placement with her doctoral dissertation in the field of education. As an LDS person who was asked to host a Native student, she points out that social and religious pressures make it hard to reject a bishop's request to take a student. With Embry's "Placement Host Families" oral histories missing, the dissertation provides vital insight into how everyday white Mormons struggled

¹⁸ Boxer, "The Lamanites Shall Blossom as the Rose."

¹⁹ Matthew Garrett, "Disentangling Binaries and the Rise of Lamanite Studies," *Religion Compass* 12 no. 11 (2018): 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12289>

to balance faith and pragmatism in the context of placement, which Riggs presents alongside novel insights drawn from her interviews with former students and their families. Another dissertation by the anthropologist Thomas S. Murphy provides a discursive history of the term “Lamanite,” showing how the term’s meaning in Mormon interpretation and practice have shifted over time. In contrast to Garrett, Murphy argues that “Lamanite” has never escaped its deeply racist origins, primarily as a means to justify colonial violence.²⁰

Finally, the sociologist Armand L. Mauss Mauss has demonstrated that the Mormon linkage of “Lamanites” to Indians rewrote diverse national and tribal histories, constructing in their place a united teleology that prophesized the “inevitable” assimilation of the continent’s Indigenous inhabitants to white Mormon lifeways.²¹ He also showed how the church expanded the “Lamanite” category as placement failed to produce significant numbers of lasting converts to the faith. When the “Day of the “Lamanite” did not take hold among the Native and First Nations people of the US and Canada, white Mormons revised the identity in order to apply it to Indigenous people in Latin America and the Pacific.

In the absence of context, placement might appear to be a gentle or even “loving” style of colonialism—but intimacy does not equate to benevolence, especially when the program is studied comparatively. Margaret Jacobs’ two books on transnational settler maternalism and non-Indians’ adoptions of Native youth have provided useful models with which to analyze child removal practices like placement.²² More specific to my discussion

²⁰ Thomas Murphy, “Imagining Lamanites: Native Americans and the Book of Mormon” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2003).

²¹ Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, 110-111.

²² Margaret Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014); Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

here, Jacobs gave a talk at the Mormon Historical Association in 2015, in which she examined the Church's Indian Student Placement Program as part and parcel of transnational settler practices in Indigenous child removal.²³ In the talk, Jacobs expanded on the ISPP in the context of the Halloway case (1986), a pivotal Utah Supreme Court decision that gave the Navajo Nation and Native communities in general more control in determining the legality of the fostering of Native children. By Garrett's accounting, Jacobs' talk shocked attendees at MHA.²⁴ Perhaps this is because Jacobs makes the critical observation that "within just a few decades of the founding of the LDS church, ministry to Lamanites involved Indian child removal."²⁵

Interestingly, Jacobs seems to be the first historian to point out the connections between placement and an earlier era, when Brigham Young advised the Saints "to buy up the Lamanite children" in Great Basin slave markets. This suggestion represents a significant departure from previous work on placement. Before this, most scholars began their histories with Helen John, a Navajo teenager who had approached her employer's Mormon family with a request to "pitch a tent" in their backyard and attend school.²⁶ Despite there being no conclusive evidence that John was indeed the first 'unofficial' placement student, scholars have not been able to resist the urge to start their narratives with such a detailed account in a history filled with disturbing silences. Unfortunately, this time it was too good to be true. Those assessments that start with John tend to project her story onto other children removed at the same time, losing sight of the broad range of Indigenous experiences during

²³ Jacobs, "Entangled Histories: The Mormon Church and Indigenous Child Removal from 1850 to 2000," *Journal of Mormon History* 42 no. 2 (2016): 27-60.

²⁴ Garrett, "Disentangling Binaries," 5.

²⁵ Jacobs, "Entangled Histories," 36.

²⁶ Birch, "Helen John," 129.

the program's earliest era, when unofficial' placements abounded in an absence of institutional oversight.

Historians broadly agree that the placement program contributed to the Indigenous child welfare crisis in the postwar world and that the program had a corrosive effect on many students' relationships to the family and home they left behind.²⁷ Still, some scholars argue that despite its shortcomings, the program represented the best possible "opportunity" for Indigenous students, as the Saints usually only carried out child removal with at least one parent's consent and allowed children to drop out (as more than half of them did). Paradoxically, this view simultaneously minimizes the program's most devastating effects on Indigenous people while also downplaying their agency.

This thesis has three chapters. The first will compare the two eras of colonial unfreedom and placement. In both eras, Mormon boarders policed Native peoples' sexualities, sought to instill the settlers' gender systems, coerced youth to labor, and justified child removal by appealing to religious beliefs that removal would uplift Native people. The captivity or boarding of Native children enriched the church and LDS families at the expense of Native communities. In the colonial period, captured, indentured, and enslaved children in Mormon households performed similar work to those Native people who would come into Utah as placement students. In both cases, servants and students were assigned different types of labor that revolved around their gender. Girls and women performed domestic work, childcare, and coercive sexual labor, while boys labored in agriculture and with Mormon livestock. This gendered system of labor surveilled both boys and girls, but

²⁷ See for example Allen, "The Rise and Decline;" Brandon Morgan, "Educating the Lamanites: A Brief History of the LDS Indian Student Placement Program," *Journal of Mormon History* 35 no. 4 (2009): 191-217; Garrett, *Making Lamanites*; Boxer, "The Lamanites Shall Blossom as the Rose;" Jacobs, *A Generation Removed*.

the “domestic sphere” of the home rendered women more vulnerable to surveillance and intimate violence. Mormon vigilance disproportionately policed women, while Native men were pressured to be patriarchal exemplars to “their people.” Finally, in both eras, an absence of church oversight failed to hold boarders accountable, allowing Mormon adults framed as guardians to abuse their power over Native youngsters. While it is important not to overemphasize similarities between two distinct eras, the similarities between placement and unfreedom ran so deep that the two become tangled up in each other, bound in a spectrum of coercion and dependency. When the Navajo teenager Helen John proposed to pitch a tent outside of a Mormon home in order to attend school, she joined just one of many generations of Native youth who found themselves embedded in a devastating reality of material deprivation, coercion, and separation from their families.

The second chapter isolates another oft-repeated binary from the placement historiography and explores it critically. Mormon observants and their historians often draw from a “two worlds” sentimentality to explain Native students’ experiences on placement. This oppositional framing depicts a progressive, enlightened, and technologically advanced white Mormon identity on the one hand; and a cursed, backwards, but redeemable “Lamanite” identity on the other. To what extent is such an oppositional framework useful—what can it tell us about how people thought about placement in their time? Conversely, what shortcomings arise from accepting this ‘two worlds’ metaphor at face value? From one perspective, both white and Indian LDS actors used oppositional metaphors as a way to think about Indigeneity. Likewise, real differences characterized the natal communities that Native students left behind and the social worlds they navigated in “foster” homes (mostly) across Western North America.

But from another view, the two worlds framework has the effect of obscuring Native peoples' agency in the face of trauma and injustice. Removal severed Native children from their homes, languages, and families, often in traumatic ways. Placement's assaults upon generational Indigenous knowledge were not just the unintended consequences of well-meaning but ignorant Mormons' actions. Instead, the makers and agents of placement policy found it useful to disguise the assimilationist project to outside observers, to prospective Indian students, and to themselves. Here, the term "Lamanite" allowed Mormons to believe they were restoring Native people to an ancient status and lifestyle, rather than seeking to assimilate Native people at the expense of their own chosen lifeways. Also, just as in an earlier era of unfreedom, "hygiene" and "health" served as a justification to map alterity onto the bodies of Native students. "Processing" centers across Utah marked new and returning participants in traumatic initiation rituals that symbolized the students' removal from home and family while they were at their most vulnerable. Yet Native families and students found ways to limit discontinuity. The disproportionate number of students who left placement suggests that most students refused to passively accept Mormon ideas of what "uplift" should look like. Meanwhile, the minority of students who stayed on placement for many years selectively embraced aspects of Mormon theology. The sparse documentary record, which focuses primarily on those least likely to be critical of placement, still reflects a careful acceptance of some Mormon truth claims, alongside an outright rejection of others. Recognition of their family's, nation's, and individual needs did not preempt students from critiquing placement's cruelty. A critical re-reading of the limited documents available to historians yields new insights when we seek to listen to those on placement, to allow their voices to fill in the historical silences.

Chapter 3 suggests that historians have mistakenly focused on placement's "benefits" and "failures" from the perspective of white Mormons' values. An investigation of the material conditions facing Native students helps to locate their agency within the historical record. Navajo students took advantage of the medical services, institutional support, and opportunities for social advancement that placement offered. Women's institutions like the Big Sister's Club of tutors show how Navajo students fought to recreate a sense of community and to help the next generation survive their studies in Utah. Finally, American Indian activists played a leading role in ending placement by working for tribal sovereignty over Native children, especially through the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act and the Halloway Case of 1987 in the Navajo Nation Children's Court.

II: “PURCHASING THEM INTO FREEDOM:” SETTLER COLONIALISM IN TWO ERAS OF INDIGENOUS CHILD REMOVAL

In the fall of 1947, scores of Diné families migrated north from their homelands to work the sugar beet fields of Richfield, Utah. Impoverished by severe drought and the federal government’s reductions to Navajo livestock, Diné laborers found themselves with limited subsistence options. Over the winter, some found a survival wage in the Utah-Idaho Sugar Beet Company. In Richfield, Diné families slept together in tents during the cold nights and rose early to top beets for Utah’s postwar sugar beet economy before returning home in spring. That fall, as Richfield’s majority Latter-day Saint population celebrated the centenary of the arrival of settler ancestors, members of the church renewed Mormon practices of taking Native children into their homes, much as their forebearers had done with captive Indigenous servants.²⁸ In 1954, the LDS Church officially sanctioned these practices of temporary Indigenous child removal by establishing the Indian Student Placement Program (ISPP). Until placement’s end in 2000, the program removed somewhere between 40,000 and 70,000 Indigenous children from their natal communities, placing them in white, LDS homes across the American West and Western Canada for the school year.²⁹

²⁸ To celebrate the centenary in 1947, President Wilford Woodruff and Heber C. Kimball of the LDS Church erected a sixty-foot-tall monument, with a twelve-foot statue of Brigham Young, the prophet who led the Saints into Utah. The statue now stands in “This is the Place” Heritage Park, the Colonial Williamsburg of Salt Lake City, which commemorates the Mormon “pioneers” who settled in Utah. See Elise Boxer, “‘This is the Place!’ Disrupting Mormon Settler Colonialism,” in *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion*, ed. Joanna Brooks and Gina Colvin (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018), 83.

²⁹ J. Neil Birch, “Helen John: The Beginnings of Indian Placement,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18, no. 4 (1985): 119-129. See also Matthew Garrett, *Making Lamanites: Mormons, Native*

Most historians begin their narratives on the ISPP with a young Navajo laborer named Helen John, who proposed to pitch a tent outside of an influential Mormon family's house in Richfield, Utah. "Hungry for education," John endured a language barrier and racism in the Richfield community.³⁰ Although she did not graduate, she excelled in art classes, winning a national competition. Afterward, she attended Brigham Young University, which enrolled more Indigenous students than any other US university in the 1970s.³¹ She met a white LDS missionary, Kenneth Woolsey Hall, and the two married in the temple, securing the new couples' access to the faith's highest blessings. On the one hand, John's tale is an uplifting story that emphasizes Native peoples' determination in the face of brutal odds. On the other, the sanguine notes that scholars lift from John's story have also concealed many troubling aspects of Mormonism's colonial relationship with Native communities.

Helen John's story provides a politically useful account—an origin story that mythologizes Mormon good intentions and a teenager's triumph. The story's hopeful optimism has led some scholars toward an overly simplified view of the program. Though uplifting to some, the story obscures placement's relationship to its historical context—that is, broader Mormon and global movements that sought to remove, foster, and educate Indigenous children. This chapter suggests that the historiography of settler colonial child removal and education schemes offers a useful means of situating the Indian Student Placement Program in a more critical, transnational context. In fact, despite the program's unusually voluntary structure and unique religious imperative to redeem American Indians,

Americans, and the Indian Student Placement Program, 1947-2000 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 36-58.

³⁰ Birch, "Helen John," 129.

³¹ Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 367.

envisioned as fallen descendants of the “Lamanites,” the church’s program resembled an international cohort of colonial child removal schemes in the 19th and 20th centuries. In this chapter, I argue that settler colonialism provides a more useful framework to think through the program’s connections not only to other, non-Mormon child removal efforts, but also the Saints’ own earlier attempts to board captive Native youth in their homes during their 19th century invasion and settlement of Utah. Through the lens of settler colonialism, it becomes clear that although the Indian Student Placement Program in some cases allowed Native students and parents to exercise greater control over the educational experiences of their children, the ISPP still worked within a settler colonial framework that aimed to alienate Native people from their lands, cultures, and communities.

This chapter begins with an explanation of settler colonialism, a useful lens for understanding placement. I will then provide a brief overview of the Mormon settlers’ invasion of the Great Basin. The Saints dispossessed Numic and Shoshonean speaking Indigenous communities of life-sustaining lands and waterways, while in their homes they initiated a period of boarding captive Indigenous children from about 1850 until 1890. These more direct efforts to eliminate Indigenous people through invasion, land expropriation, direct violence, and unfreedom can help to shed new light on the later Indian Student Placement Program. Next, the chapter examines the ISPP’s cohort of 19th and 20th century movements to remove and educate Indigenous children. I suggest that foregrounding studies of placement in the earlier histories of Mormon boarding of Indigenous captives and other settler colonial schemes of education provides a more complete, less parochial view of the history than the more limited view often framed by the story of Helen John.

Before examining the usefulness of settler colonialism for placement historiography, it is important to define settler colonialism and address its evolution as a concept. In 1999, Patrick Wolfe proposed the term “settler colonialism” to characterize historical situations where colonizers not only extract resources, but also “come to stay” in lands recently expropriated from Native people.³² In Wolfe’s telling, settler colonialism is a violent structure of dispossession, undergirded by a “logic of elimination” whereby Indigenous people are replaced with settlers who steal the land and naturalize their ownership of it.³³ Recent scholarship has elaborated upon Wolfe’s original framework, arguing that Wolfe’s definition of settler colonial invasion “as a structure, not an event” might imply a stasis and omnipresence that denies the concept’s own historicity, while Wolfe’s original formulation has been criticized for creating an oversimplified binary: the settler and “the Native.”³⁴ This dualistic reading of settler colonialism separates all historical actors into Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, where Indigenous actors can only cooperate with the settler colonial system or resist it—flattening historical complexity.³⁵

³² See Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388, where Wolfe succinctly describes his first formulation of the term from Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology, The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, (New York: Cassell, 1999), 2.

³³ Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 387.

³⁴ Ibid, 388; and Wolfe, “Nation and MiscegenATION: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era,” *Social Analysis*, no. 36 (1994): 96. For a criticism of the ways that discussions of settler colonialism as a structure might present the concept as an ahistoric, universal theory, see Jeffrey Ostler and Nancy Shoemaker, “Settler Colonialism in Early American History: Introduction,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2019): 364. For a criticism of settler colonialism and other “1990s-era theory” in the context of histories of Indigeneity and Mormonism, see Matthew Garrett, “Disentangling Binaries and the Rise of Lamanite Studies,” *Religion Compass* 12, no. 3 (2018): 6. Garrett critiques the use of binary-prone theory, which he argues results in presentist scholarship where “indigenous resisters enjoy moral supremacy over racist white oppressors.”

³⁵ Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel, “Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 2 (2014): 9.

Other critics from Indigenous studies and elsewhere have rightly noted that a vision of settler colonialism as a ‘structure’ might imply the view that the violent expropriation of Indigenous peoples’ land was inevitable and that the struggle for Indigenous sovereignty has concluded indefinitely in the settler’s favor. Addressing this tendency to speak of settler colonialism as an omnipresent, ahistorical force, Jeffrey Ostler and Nancy Shoemaker have sought to give settler colonialism greater analytical precision, urging us to conceptualize settler colonialism as “a process, not a structure or an event.”³⁶ Reformers have also responded to the call to expand the problematic binary opposition laid out in Wolfe’s original formulation of settler colonialism. For example, as Stephanie Smallwood points out, the settler/Indigenous binary leaves out formerly enslaved Black people, a diasporic community involuntarily trafficked to the colonized lands of the United States, but who still settled onto Indigenous lands to secure their own futurity in the face of whites’ anti-Black racism.³⁷ Settler colonialism as a lens of analysis need not bludgeon historical complexity to a simplistic pulp in order to unify diverse colonial power structures—instead, it can lay bare unique, local historical contingencies while keeping a critical eye on broader trends and processes. Shifting settler colonialism to consider regional variation or complex actors need not rupture the framework but serves to enrich and specify it. Settler colonialism is therefore best conceived not as a universal theory to which the past must conform to, but instead as a set of tools that allow researchers to examine the complexities of colonialism. Calls for greater inclusivity and specificity need not discourage settler colonialism’s use as an analytical lens; they should sharpen its capacity to ask the right sort of questions. This process of

³⁶ Ostler and Shoemaker, “Settler Colonialism in Early American History,” 364.

³⁷ Stephanie E. Smallwood, “Reflections on Settler Colonialism, the Hemispheric Americas, and Chattel Slavery,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2019): 407-416.

refinement, especially in the literature of colonial education, has made settler colonialism an increasingly useful lens with which to examine Mormon child removal practices.

Historian Elise Boxer has recently argued that settler colonialism is an especially useful framework for understanding Mormon settlement in the Great Basin.³⁸ Recent critiques of the fields of Mormon studies and church history have also drawn attention to the field's parochialism, where historians of the church and Utah tend not to connect their research to broader histories of the United States, just as historians of the US tend to overlook the national significance of Mormonism.³⁹ As Jared Farmer notes, scholarship on Mormonism and Utah tends to get trapped like water in the Great Basin, nothing in and nothing out.⁴⁰ Here, the history of child removal and settler colonialism can provide a useful corrective, by situating placement in broader historical trajectories. This scholarship also helps to shed light on the Saints' first experiences as settlers in the Great Basin.

When Mormons entered the Salt Lake Valley, they did not settle in a "no-man's land."⁴¹ Instead, the lands were occupied by communities of Numic- and Shoshonean-

³⁸ Boxer, "This is the Place!," in *Decolonizing Mormonism*, 77-83.

³⁹ The topic of Native American history in relation to Mormon history also remains critically under-explored. For an excellent historiography on Mormon studies and LDS history, see Jared Farmer, "Crossroads of the West," *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 1 (2015): 156-73.

⁴⁰ Farmer, *On Zion's Mount*, 14. Although not explicitly a settler colonial history, this book explores the meaning-making processes that Mormons used to transform the places they colonized in the Great Basin. First the Saints colonized a lake critical to Indigenous peoples like the Timpanogos Utes, then the settlers misremembered a nearby mountain, "Timpanogos," as the place where Indians *really* used to dwell, naturalizing their claims to the Utah Lake and Valley.

⁴¹ This notion of the Salt Lake Valley as a "no-man's land" in between warring Numic- and Shoshonean-speaking communities prevails today in popular commemorations of colonization and even in some academic histories. Jared Farmer traces the origins of this term to Norton Jacob, an early LDS settler who believed that the Great Salt Lake Valley was "unoccupied." Farmer goes on to note that the settlers were visited within days of their arrival by several of the valley's Neme-Nuche inhabitants, led by Wanship and Goship, who traded and asserted their ownership over the land. See "The Record of Norton Jacob," typescript (1949), Utah History Research Center, Salt Lake City, 73, reported in Farmer, *On Zion's Mount*, 50.

speaking peoples, later referred to as Utes and Goshutes. Even though the Salt Lake valley seemed ripe for settlement to the Saints, who had travelled thousands of miles on dangerous and disease-ridden trails, the Wasatch Range's largest valley paled in comparison to the riverine abundance that Timpanogos people enjoyed in the Utah Lake Valley to the south. There, Native people held gatherings in the rich fisheries along the Provo river, developing ceremonial senses of embeddedness not just within their lands but along the rivers and lakes that fed them. When the Saints entered the valley (which the settlers later named Provo) in search of more arable soil for livestock and agriculture, they entered a water world.⁴²

The Mormon settlers arrived in Utah with a set of ready-made theological framings for Native people, many adopted from the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's early teachings. The Book of Mormon teaches that Israelites travelled from Europe to the unpopulated American continents around 600 B.C.E., under the guidance of God. Soon after, the Israelite emigrants divided into two groups—the Nephites and the Lamanites. As a result of their decision to separate from the Nephites, the Book of Mormon explains that God cursed the Lamanites with “a skin of blackness,” so that they would not be “enticing unto” the fair-skinned Nephites. The Lamanites sunk into a period of spiritual backwardness and decay, becoming “an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey.”⁴³ Apart from a brief period of harmony during which Jesus Christ escaped his tomb in Jerusalem to Christianize the Nephites, the two tribes were at war. After Christ's short sojourn in the Americas, the dark-skinned Lamanites waged a final war against their lighter-skinned cousins the Nephites, exterminating them. Thus, as the only surviving descendants of Israelites, early Mormon theology considered Native Americans to

⁴² Ibid, 19-54.

⁴³ 2 Ne. 5:21, 5:24.

be a “fallen” group, but one capable of uplift and redemption. In fact, early interpretations of the Book of Mormon imagined Native peoples as central to the project of rebuilding God’s Kingdom in the Americas—as leaders without whom the Euro-American “Gentiles” would fail to achieve true salvation. Euro-Americans could help to achieve this goal, Smith sometimes argued, but Native Americans would have to lead the way. Contrary to other Christian faiths practiced during the Second Great Awakening, then, early Mormons seem not to have preached to Native Americans solely in the interest of “redeeming a fallen people.” Missionaries also wanted to convert American Indians because they believed that “Lamanites” would serve a crucial role in bringing about New Jerusalem and the Second Coming of Christ.⁴⁴

The Mormons’ invasion of Utah further destabilized a “Lamanite” category already in a state of flux. As Mormon control over lands, lakes, and rivers expanded, the valley’s Indigenous peoples found themselves increasingly enmeshed in a system of unequal obligations with white settlers. Church patriarchs instructed missionaries to “feed, clothe, and instruct the Indians,” though their efforts usually met with disappointing results for the missionaries. Still, church authorities sought to “civilize” Native people by encouraging or forcing Native people to move onto demonstration farms, insisting that white, male settlers broker plural marriages with Indigenous women, and facilitating the “adoption” of Indigenous children, often as unfree servants.⁴⁵ Despite the benevolent rhetoric,

⁴⁴ Garrett, *Making Lamanites*, 15-16; see also Thomas Murphy, “Imagining Lamanites: Native Americans and the Book of Mormon” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2003); Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 17-36; and Farmer, *On Zion’s Mount*, 55-58.

⁴⁵ Parley P. Pratt quoted in Thomas D. Brown, “Journal of the Southern Indian Mission,” manuscript in the possession of the LDS Church Historian’s Office, reproduced in Juanita Brooks, “Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1944): 11. See also Garrett, *Making Lamanites*, 32.

Intermountain Numic communities instead faced scarcity and starvation caused by settler land expropriation from 1847 onwards. After the invasion, shrinking access to ceremonially important fisheries and the settlers' irrigation of once-abundant rivers drove Timpanogos Utes, who called themselves the "fish-eaters," to starvation.⁴⁶ Settlers also committed direct acts of violence, killing Native people in wars, massacres, and mass executions, then taking any surviving children as captive laborers in their homes.⁴⁷

Beleaguered by the loss of life, scarcity, and rapid changes in the accessibility of ritually important lands and waters, Native people increasingly had to modify their trade practices to satisfy Mormon appetites, since the Saints took hold of many resources that Indigenous communities had previously relied upon for spiritual and physical sustenance. At the same time, Mormons did not merely recreate their pre-existing understandings of "Lamanites" and bondage in the Great Basin. Instead, the Saints were incorporated into pre-existing patterns of enslavement in the Great Basin.⁴⁸ Equestrian Ute raiders kidnapped Goshute, Paiute, Shoshone, and Navajo people—mainly women and children—and sold them in New Mexico as slaves and indentured servants. The Ute traffickers led by Walkara

⁴⁶ Farmer, *On Zion's Mount*, 2009, 54-104.

⁴⁷ The Valentine's Day Massacre (February 14, 1850) involved the mass murder of captive Ute men in front of relative women and children. The Native men who fled were pursued by Latter-day Saints on horseback across the frozen Lake Utah, and shot dead. See *Ibid*, 74. In another instance of violence against noncombatants, in 1866, during the beginning of the so-called Black Hawk War, a community of Mormons captured about thirty Numic speakers—the entire Koosharem band of Pauites—and slaughtered them in the nearby church. Informants recall that at least three children escaped, but two were later captured. Settlers murdered one of the escapees and sold the other boy to a white LDS family, who locked him in a barn, according to his descendants. He was given the name Dave Munson. It is unclear whether the boy performed labor for the family, or why he was locked in the barn. See Albert Winkler, "The Circleville Massacre: a Brutal Incident in Utah's Black Hawk War," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (1987): 4-21; and Sarah Barringer Gordon and Jan Shipp, "Fatal Convergence in the Kingdom of God: The Mountain Meadows Massacre in American History," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 2 (2017): 345, footnote 55.

⁴⁸ See Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

and his brother Sanpete soon found a market in the recently arrived Latter-day Saints, who saw themselves as sympathetic to the captives and vowed to purchase the Indians “into freedom” as an act of humanitarian service.⁴⁹ As Church President Brigham Young noted in his 1852 gubernatorial address, Mormons worried that they needed to purchase the enslaved, or else doom them to “the low, servile drudgery of Mexican slavery. . . raised by beings scarcely superior to themselves.”⁵⁰

So Mormon settlers took it upon themselves to regulate the Intermountain slave trade. Ironically, the church’s efforts at restriction merely pulled Native children from the jaws of one unfreedom in order to ensnare them in another.⁵¹ Mormons favored the use of familial and patriarchal metaphors to characterize the purchase of Indigenous people, and some scholars have followed suit. In such terms, Saints who purchased children from equestrian Ute, New Mexican, and Mormon traffickers were seen to merely “adopt” those children into the family. Buyers’ adoption metaphors implied that these children would not be expected to carry out any labor that the family would not assign to its own biological children. Nor, according to the 1852 “Act for the Relief of Indian Slaves and Prisoners,” were such laborers to be held in bondage for more than twenty years.⁵² Finally, perhaps desiring to differentiate themselves from Numic and New Mexican slaveholders, the LDS

⁴⁹ For the quote, see Brigham Young, “Governor’s Message,” *Deseret News* 2 no. 5 (January 10th 1852): 2.

⁵⁰ Brigham Young, “Governor’s Message,” *Deseret News*, 10 January 1852.

⁵¹ For a comparative history of the New Mexican and Mormon slaveries in the Southwest, see Sondra Jones, *The Trial of Don Pedro Leon Luján: The Attack against Indian Slavery and the Mexican Traders in Utah* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000).

⁵² “A Preamble and an Act for the further relief of Indian Slaves and Prisoners,” from “Utah Laws Against Slavery,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 2, no. (1929): 212-214. Accessed from https://issuu.com/utah10/docs/volume_2_1929/87 on September 1, 2019.

settlers required indenturers to send captive children to school for at least three months out of the year.⁵³

They also assigned laborers gender-specific tasks, which allowed them to argue that the indentures taught students useful skills that would help them to start productive, Mormon, patriarchal families of their own as freed adults. This turned out to be something of a hollow justification—since indenturers frequently failed to free their servants upon expiration of the contract. Additionally, as Brian Q. Cannon has shown, Indigenous people struggled to marry among white Mormons, who held racist and prejudiced ideas against Indians. At the same time, many formerly indentured laborers struggled to return to natal communities that they had not lived in for decades. Even the gendered labor itself could acquire traumatic meanings, when we consider that such obligations did not always match the kind of work that unfree laborers could have expected to perform in their natal communities, further reinforcing the social alienation of the unfree. As K. Tsianina Lomawaima has argued in the case of assimilationist labor “education” at American Indian boarding schools, culturally-defined notions of women’s domesticity rendered them vulnerable to much higher degrees of white surveillance than their masculine peers.⁵⁴ The same seems to have been the case among the predominantly female unfree laborers in Mormon country, even though the environment was the Latter-day Saint home, rather than Chilocco Indian School’s walls.

⁵³ Ibid; Brooks, “Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier,” 8.

⁵⁴ K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Brian Q. Cannon, “‘To Buy Up the Lamanite Children as Fast as They Could’: Indentured Servitude and Its Legacy in Mormon Society,” *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no. 2 (2018): 1-35.

Other patriarchal metaphors abounded before the end of the 19th century. These, too, could become enshrined in LDS law, though some almost certainly escaped the historical ledger's purview. Sexual relationships between captive Native girls and Mormon patriarchs at least thrice their age were formalized in "marriages," and historians have parroted this nomenclature, implicitly reinforcing the view that captive children wholeheartedly agreed to such unions. Though the lack of existing documentary evidence suggests that we might seek more information before labeling such clearly power-laden relationships "slavery," we should also unquestionably criticize settlers' claims and historians' insinuations that such intermarriages were always "free." Because Native captives appear to have been concentrated in the households of elite Mormons, patriarchs who took Native women as brides frequently did so in a context of polygamy, where a man's wealth and status correlated to pre-existing marriages with many white women. For example, Aaron Daniels purchased Rose, a Navajo teenager, in order to serve his plural wives—but after the wives left, Daniels 'married' Rose. At least four more Native women—Fanny Shantaquint Allred, Kate Dutson, Eliza Hamblin, and Pernetta "Nettie" Seccunup Murdock—were also married to their captors in the colonial era.⁵⁵

The archival absence of the voices of Native women who faced such abuse is no accident. In understanding the scope of Indian women's sexual unfreedom in Mormon households, we must remember that many women came to LDS communities after their own were destroyed, sometimes by Native equestrians, sometimes by Mormon settlers. Settlers passing through Utah on the way to California reported that Mormons waged a "war

⁵⁵ Cannon, "To Buy Up the Lamanite Children," 26.

of extermination” to produce captives, in which all adult men and most women were killed.⁵⁶ Thus, Native people experiencing potential sexual unfreedom found themselves in a system of dependency that lay at the crossroads of genocide, the trauma of their parents’ deaths, and sexual violence among Latter-day Saints.

For Brigham Young and other members of the church hierarchy, controlling the trading patterns of Natives, “gentiles,” and Saints was also about expressing their colonial dominance over lands they constructed as a “New Jerusalem,” and over the peoples they sought to subordinate to their categorical roles in the Book of Mormon. Perhaps forcing a “Lamanite” child to live in their homes could subdue momentarily the crushing realization that Native peoples were not the servile leaders Mormons had envisioned them to be. If Native communities had failed to live up to the Book of Mormon’s prophecies for them—if they fought back and were too successful at resisting Mormon colonialism—then enslaved and indentured youth offered another road to salvation, or at least the hope that the next generation of “Lamanites” might “blossom as the rose.”⁵⁷

By removing and eliminating Native people from their land and then naturalizing settler presence on that land, Mormons practiced settler colonialism. The settlers came to stay, first ignoring Native peoples’ claims to the land as illegitimate, turning to violence when necessary to displace Indigenous communities, and finally arguing that the settler presence was justified by the civilizational benefits they brought to those whose lands were colonized. Like settlers elsewhere, Mormon claims to Indigenous territory relied on the belief that they

⁵⁶ George E. Montgomery to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, July 26, 1850, in Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Utah Superintendency, 1849-1880, microfilm reel 897, in Tom L. Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Cannon, ““To Buy Up the Lamanite Children,”” 8.

⁵⁷ See Garrett, *Making Lamanites*, 11-35, for a discussion of the role that the category of Lamanite played in Mormon-Native relations and missionary activities in the colonial era.

improved “disappearing” Native communities by teaching them Euro-American gender and labor norms. As such, the Mormons did not see themselves as squatters on Indigenous land; instead, they cast themselves as civilized teachers to the “Lamanites.” By helping restore the “Lamanites” to their former glory through Christianization and an understanding of their “true” history, church authorities argued, Mormons made themselves worthy to share in the bounty of the Kingdom of Heaven.

As we have seen, these justifications rested on settlers’ ability to assimilate Native children through indenture and other forms of unfree labor. Forcibly absorbing an Indigenous child into the LDS community not only robbed those with conflicting land claims of a future group member, they also provided settlers with proof of what they took to be Euro-American civilizational superiority. It is telling that even though their indenture and enslavement practices bore a resemblance to those of the New Mexican *Hispanos*, Mormons were able to convince themselves that they were in fact purchasing the children “into freedom,” especially by articulating a vision of servitude that included education.⁵⁸ In other words, Mormons saw themselves as uplifting Native children through indenture in ways that justified removing the children from their communities.

Particularly in their belief that colonial education and labor could uplift Indigenous people, Mormon settlers’ indenture practices appear similar to other settler colonial schemes that aimed to “civilize” Native people—to make them into useful citizens for the settler

⁵⁸ Brigham Young remarked that the Mormon ‘adoption’ practices “may be said to present a new feature in the traffic of human beings; it is essentially purchasing them into freedom, instead of slavery; but it is not the low, servile drudgery of Mexican slavery, to which I would doom them, not to be raised among beings scarcely superior to themselves, but where they could find that consideration pertaining not only to civilized, but *humane* and benevolent society” [italics mine]. Brigham Young, *The Teachings of President Brigham Young Volume 3, 1852-1854*, compiled by Fred C. Collier (Salt Lake City: Collier’s Publishing Company, 1987), 16.

colonial state. As Rebecca Swartz argues, education provided a justification for British settler colonies to alter Indigenous land use and labor traditions. In colonial Natal, the Cape, New Zealand, and Australia, industrial education as a concept helped settlers to cover up the violence of colonialism by stressing the humanitarian services they offered Indigenous children through education. Just as with LDS indenture practices, settlers in the British empire became convinced of the value of labor in educating Indigenous children, especially to address Indigenous peoples' supposed laziness and inferiority by teaching them useful skills. Generally, the humanitarian calls for Indigenous education sounded by missionaries, government officials, and researchers throughout the British empire shifted in the 1830s, so that by the 1870s school systems increasingly conformed to biological conceptions of racial difference, often segregating 'white' and Indigenous students. In Western Australia, education officials developed "protection" programs to remove children from the contaminating influence of their Aboriginal families. Later child removal efforts in the United States and Canada, including the Indian Student Placement Program, would also operate from the belief that Indigenous families were deficient to justify removal, though as we shall see, such concerns were not purely racial.⁵⁹

Though he did not have the opportunity to use Wolfe's formulation in his 1995 *Education for Extinction*, the scholar David Wallace Adams anticipated scholarship on the history of Indigenous education that would use a settler colonial framework. The book outlines the history of boarding schools in the United States, in which reformers like Richard Henry Pratt sought to transform Indigenous children through assimilationist education in "white civilization." Adams argued that the "war against Indians" had entered a new phase

⁵⁹ Rebecca Swartz, *Education and Empire: Children, Race, and Humanitarianism in the British Settler Colonies, 1833-1880* (London: Cham Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 22, 134-137, 218.

with the so-called closing of the frontier in 1890, as settlers increasingly turned their attention from violent, direct conflict to a “gentler fashion” of elimination: education.⁶⁰

The federal government and reformers envisioned three types of institutions to accomplish the transformations they hoped to see in Native youth: reservation day schools, reservation boarding schools, and off-reservation boarding schools. Originally, reformers argued that the day schools represented the best possible option for Native youth, since the students’ proximity to home would help “reverse the traditional educational configuration in the parent-child relationship.”⁶¹ In other words, reformers theorized that children schooled on reservations would maintain close ties to their families and would teach the older generations to adopt Anglo-American cultural practices and the English language. However, though the day schools were inexpensive and generated the least opposition from Indigenous parents, reformers ultimately decided that day schools provided an ineffective means of assimilation. The day school’s proximity to Native nations enabled Indigenous students to keep daily contact with their kin, and to continue to speak their own languages. Reformers grew frustrated that the schools did not do enough to distance students from their Indigeneity and make them more similar to “civilized” white people.⁶²

Though Adams focuses on boarding schools in the United States, his observations ring true of other settler colonial education programs. Settler colonial strategies to assimilate Indigenous children differed from directly violent, outright efforts to exterminate Indigenous people and force them from their lands, but scholars of child removal, boarding schools, and industrial schools have revealed that the seemingly less harsh tactics of child

⁶⁰ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 27.

⁶¹ Ibid, 29.

⁶² Ibid.

removal and education share settler colonialism's underlying goals. Removal and education in white homes and government or church-run institutions complemented violent conquest and supported a process of "deeper colonization," designed to eliminate Indigenous children's identities and to transform them into productive, working class members of settler society.⁶³ Though proponents of such education schemes characterized their efforts as more enlightened than direct, military colonizers, such reformers still sought to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land, communities, cultures, and identities.

In Canada, the United States, and Australia, the removal and education strategy addressed settler fears that the continuing existence of Indigenous people posed a threat to settler colonial nation-building efforts. Canadian, Australian, and American reformers also responded to diminishing Indigenous subsistence abilities as displacement and war shrunk their land base. Rather than consider that the settler state should return Indigenous lands, reformers sought to reduce Indigenous dependence on government aid by removing Indigenous children and transforming them into 'productive' citizens. Child removal therefore provided a justification for and a means of ending Indigenous communities' status as separate, sovereign peoples, and their dependence on government aid. At the same time, the strategy permitted reformers to claim that they had benevolent intentions of civilizing and uplifting removed children. As Margaret Jacobs observes, North Americans tended to characterize removal as "rescue," while Australian officials referred to their child removal policy as Aboriginal "protection." In lieu of seeking Indigenous people's military elimination as an invented racial category (conveyed by terms like "Indian," "Aboriginal," or "Lamanite"), reformers sought instead to undermine and ultimately destroy Indigenous conceptions of

⁶³ David B. Macdonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens: Genocide, Indian Residential Schools, and the Challenge of Conciliation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 67-68.

themselves as distinct cultural communities. Jacobs also points out that settler colonial child removal and education strategies sought to sever the “affective bonds that that tied indigenous children to their kin, community, culture and homelands.”⁶⁴ Assimilationist education and child removal therefore sought not only to destroy Indigenous identities, but ultimately to dispossess Indigenous communities of their claims to land.

An example drawn from the ‘father’ of American boarding schools, Richard Pratt, helps to further illustrate how an education for extinction could take on settler colonial dimensions, and to set it in context of the Indian Student Placement Program. In 1913, Colonel Richard Henry Pratt addressed the Friends of the Indian at Lake Mohonk, New York. As the founder of Carlisle Indian Industrial School (founded 1879), Pratt gave a brief history of his work to “civilize the Indian.” During the American Civil War, Pratt helped lead a Black infantry regiment, which he credited as shaping his views on Native education in the decades to come. “Slavery,” he argued to his reformer colleagues, was “the greatest friend the negro in America ever had,” since it forced African American people to rapidly assimilate to white Anglo-American society. By removing the enslaved from their homes and natal communities in a forced migration across the Atlantic, Pratt lauded how enslavement had forced African diasporans to learn English, to lose their “native tongue,” and to “develop.” In Pratt’s eyes, “ten million” Black people were now “all useful and citizens,” representing a cultural and linguistic uplift that he now desired for Native people.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, xxx.

⁶⁵ Richard Henry Pratt, “Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples,” from *Report of the Annual Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples*, Mohonk Lake, New York. The quotations come from pp. 198 and 204. See also Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 54.

To Pratt, the boarding schools were a good start for Indians, but ultimately the Native people of North America would need an extra civilizational boost—something that did for Native people what Pratt believed slavery had accomplished for Black people. Pratt thought that the best way forward lay with Carlisle’s “outing program,” which placed Native students enrolled at the boarding school in white Anglo homes over the summer. There, the students labored at low wages for the family, and according to Pratt, benefited from the civilizing influences and English language education offered by the host family. The former colonel reasoned that his experiment with summer outings from the boarding schools represented the most realistic path forward for Native youth, but thought that an ideal solution to “the Indian problem” would involve housing all 70,000 Indian children in the United States in white homes for the entire year, where they would attend public school alongside the white family’s biological children. Once isolated from their Indigenous communities and “scattered” about the country, Pratt predicted that Native children would let go of their “barbaric” ways in order to embrace the trappings of white American citizenship, culture, and education. To Pratt, such a program represented the ideal “recipe” to “end the whole Indian business.”⁶⁶

However, as Pratt acknowledged in his talk, such a program fell short of what the Anglo-American “friends of the Indian” could feasibly achieve in the late twentieth century. Their nascent movement to remove Indian children lacked the federal funding and the coercive power to force or convince every single Native family in the country to give up their children for removal and placement in white foster homes. Still, Pratt’s “outing program” proved influential, as a number of Indian boarding schools besides Carlisle copied

⁶⁶ Pratt, *Report of the Annual Lake Mohonk Conference*, 199.

the model, sending out their female students to toil in white homes and the male students to labor in the fields over the summer, though even combined the outing programs fell far short of removing 70,000 children. The closest a removal and host program would come to achieving the sheer number of removed children Pratt hoped for would arrive in the next century—in the form of the “outing program” of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, later known as the Indian Student Placement Program. Both contemporary observers and some historians have focused on the LDS program as a “unique” educational experience created by a “peculiar” people, but as Pratt’s speech shows, solutions to the “Indian problem” that involved the removal of Indigenous children into settler homes had long appealed to white reformers in Indian education as an even more effective way to separate Indigenous children from their natal homes, cultures, and communities.

Just as Henry Pratt conceived of boarding schools as a workable solution that differed from the ideal, the Canadian superintendent general Duncan Campbell Scott considered residential schools a step in the right direction, but ultimately worried the schools would take many generations to complete their assimilationist work. Intermarriage offered a quicker solution, which would force the “absorption” of the “Indian race” into the white population, finally overcoming “the lingering traces of native custom and tradition.”⁶⁷ Australian reformers sought to make Duncan’s ideal intermarriage policy a reality—where Australian authorities removed lighter-skinned, “half-cast” Aboriginal people to marry only white and other “half-cast” spouses.⁶⁸ This scheme to “breed out the colour” arose from

⁶⁷ D.C. Scott, “Report of the Superintendent of Indian Education,” In *Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the year ended 31 March 1910*, 273; quoted in Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 34.

⁶⁸ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 69.

settler anxieties of becoming a racial minority, but also sought to resolve the so-called “Aboriginal problem” by eliminating the Indigenous population’s cultural and perceived racial uniqueness. For Canadian and Australian authorities, lighter skin became a marker of potential civilization and advancement, though whiteness remained somewhat aloof. Policies of intermarriage and “breeding out the colour” sought to make Indigenous individuals “palatable to the settler, but not necessarily like the settler.”⁶⁹

Mormon beliefs about Lamanites echoed these strategies to “absorb” Indigenous people and “breed out the color.” The Book of Mormon had prophesied that the “Lamanites” would “become white and delightsome” as they progressed from a people cursed with a “skin of blackness” to modern Mormons, with a restored knowledge of their supposedly true origins.⁷⁰ Urged on by pronouncements from Spencer W. Kimball, president of the church, many LDS host families believed that they were helping Native people to transform not only culturally—but racially, too. In a speech delivered at the 1960 General Conference, Kimball declared that “the children in a placement home are often lighter than their brothers and sisters in the hogans on the reservation.”⁷¹ It should be noted that Kimball did not believe that the students would whiten in subsequent generations through intermarriage, which was strongly discouraged by the program. Instead, Saints like Kimball believed in a sort of racial alchemy; that an Indigenous child could be whitened through moral, social, and spiritual enlightenment. In their concerns over racial transformation and whiteness as a marker of civilization, the placement program echoed the logic of Canadian and Australian child removal policies.

⁶⁹ MacDonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens*, 70.

⁷⁰ 2 Ne. 5:21, 30:6.

⁷¹ Spencer W. Kimball, “Of Royal Blood,” *Ensign* July 1971, 7. Article adapted from an address given at the Lamanite Youth Conference in Salt Lake City, April 24, 1971.

Other similarities in the Indigenous child removal policies of the first half of the twentieth century make clear placement's shared settler colonial values and underlying logic. Though a postwar program, the Indian Student Placement Program embraced some aspects of maternalism, like reformers in Australia and the United States.⁷² From the program's official organization in 1954 until the unification of Church social services in 1969, the program was carried out by the women's Relief Society under the direction of Belle S. Spafford, the most prominent female leader in the church.⁷³ Though the church's removal agents (social workers and missionaries) tended to be men, Relief Society women played a central role in readying the children for placement, since church leaders thought of white women as compassionate and capable mothers that would spur the child's transition to Anglo-Mormon homes. However, placement children's experiences with Mormon host families differed greatly from Indian and Aboriginal children's lives in maternalist institutions. In most white LDS homes during placement, students were subject not only to maternal authority of host mothers but also found themselves beholden to the patriarchal authority of the traditional head of household—the husband and father who held the priesthood on his family's behalf. Still, the patriarchal LDS family distributed the domestic labor assigned to placement students in a gendered ways, just like the maternalist institutions for Aboriginal and Indian children, where Indigenous girls performed domestic labor while boys worked with livestock.

Another era of child removal in Canada, the United States, and Australia occurred in the years following the Second World War, documented by another of Jacobs' books, *A*

⁷² Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*.

⁷³ Mayola Miltenberger, *Fifty Years of Relief Society Social Services* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), 38-39.

Generation Removed. This time, however, Jacobs argues that the dominant ideology justifying removal was what Peggy Pascoe has called “colorblindness,” not maternalism. To Pascoe, “colorblindness” is the “powerfully persuasive belief that the eradication of racism depends on the deliberate non-recognition of race.”⁷⁴ Liberal American and Canadian reformers in the 1950s and 1960s now sought removal and adoption as a means of giving American Indian and First Nation children access to the same “opportunities” available to white children. To accomplish this, social welfare agencies and religious institutions oversaw the removal of Indigenous children from their communities and adoption in the homes of white families. They sought to distance themselves from the reformers responsible for boarding and residential schools, perceiving their adoption and placement programs as humanitarian acts of reconciliation for past injustices.⁷⁵ The Indian Student Placement Program was no outlier here, and in 1969 President Spencer W. Kimball argued that Mormons had a debt to repay Native people for past colonial injustices.⁷⁶ Thus, the North American adoption measures of the postwar years operated off an awareness of colonialism’s past injustices, though colorblindness prevented the agents of child removal from recognizing how their own practices also represented an ongoing commitment to settler colonialism.

Building off the logic of earlier settler colonial education systems in the British Empire, adoption agencies in the United States, Canada, and Australia used humanitarian rhetoric to describe their Indigenous child removal policies. They especially criticized

⁷⁴ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 313.

⁷⁵ Margaret Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 64. See also Jacobs, “Entangled Histories: The Mormon Church and Indigenous Child Removal from 1850 to 2000,” *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 2 (2016): 41.

⁷⁶ Jacobs, “Entangled Histories,” 41.

Indigenous families as backward, haunted by alcoholism, and miserably impoverished. Under such circumstances, the Indian Adoption Project (IAP) in the US and Adopt Indian Métis (AIM) in British Columbia characterized the removal of Indigenous children as a humanitarian, benevolent act.⁷⁷ The ISPP relied on similar statements of selfless altruism, even though the program only temporarily relocated children (for the most part). Church officials and social workers framed LDS host parents as volunteers who had opened their homes in a selfless effort to provide Native youth with “social, educational, spiritual, and cultural opportunities.”⁷⁸ Like IAP and AIM, the LDS program “rested on an individualist notion of rescuing and redeeming the Indian child from what its founders believed was a backward and even wicked life.”⁷⁹ Like other North American child removal movements in the late 20th century, placement enacted a settler colonial logic of elimination by removing Indigenous children, erasing their relationship to their natal communities—and, critically—their land.

The placement program’s links to larger child removal movements across North America also go beyond the abstract, if useful, similarities. In 1975, Perry Allen of the Navajo Tribal Court asserted that most adoptions of Diné (Navajo) children by non-Navajo foster parents occurred through the LDS Social Services program.⁸⁰ The similarities between IAP, AIM, and placement were not the only ways in which diverse child removal movements became entangled. Even though placement was supposed to be a temporary

⁷⁷ Jacobs, *A Generation Removed*.

⁷⁸ Clarence R. Bishop, “Indian Placement: A History of the Indian Student Placement Program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (Master’s Thesis, University of Utah, 1967), 103.

⁷⁹ Jacobs, *A Generation Removed*, 89.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 88.

foster care program, the system of child removal created to support the ISPP also led to more permanent forms of removal for Navajo children.

Conclusion

Helen John's account, useful though it is, presents a convenient "snapshot" that flattens historical complexity. In a muddled history full of silences and incomplete stories, one understands why historians and church officials alike have clung to Helen John and all she represents. Hers is a politically useful account, something of an origin story that mythologizes Mormon good intentions and a teenager's triumph. In the story, Helen John emerges from a violent past that we need not dwell upon, severing the historical timeline into discrete eras of a colonial past and a humanitarian, modern present. This chapter has proposed a different starting point, rooted in broader context, since placement was not without its precedents. Postwar child removal programs like the ISPP may seem less brutal than earlier child removal and education strategies, but they still shared the same settler colonial logic.

And yet the roots of placement go farther back, deep into the soil of the LDS community's own collective memory. When Mormons began informally adopting the children of migrant Navajo farm workers in the 1940s, they drew from Mormon discourses that justified the unfree boarding, indenture, and enslavement of Native people from an earlier era. In both instances, Mormons claimed those they called "Lamanites" as ancestral kin from the Book of Mormon. Faith that the "Day of the Lamanite" would arrive led Mormons to champion their own version of Native uplift through industrious labor and Indians' recognition of the "fullness of the gospel." The similarities between Placement and captivity ran so deep that the two can be used to inform each other, each emerging out of a

context of coercion and dependency. When Helen John exchanged her tent for a place in a non-Indian household, she joined other Native youth in a long history of patriarchy and colonialism.

III: EXPERIENCING PLACEMENT: THE ISPP AND INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

In 1962, six-year-old Aneta Whaley rises early to take her mother's sheep to water. As the sun rises over Diné Bikéyah—Southwestern homeland of the Navajos—she herds the sheep ten miles to the nearest water source, then hikes ten miles back through the Arizona desert to her family's hogan. Built by her father, the hogan faces East—toward Sis Naajiní, one of the four sacred mountains that the Diné use to reenforce their awareness of place in Diné Bikéyah.⁸¹ As gifts from the Diyin Dine'é, the Holy People, to First Man and First Woman, hogans like the one Aneta grew up in represent not just shelters but sacred dwellings in Diné cosmology. Steeped in ritualistic meaning, each side of the hogan represents one of the four sacred mountains and corresponding sacred directions, uniting the family in harmony to help them overcome hardship and adversity. Aneta's grandfather and grandmother live nearby in their own hogan and help Aneta's parents watch over the children, a living arrangement that many Diné would have understood as desirable because it allowed the grandparents to pass on critical generational knowledge from a long life lived the Navajo way. Therefore, even though Aneta does not currently attend school, her early educational experiences in her family greatly enrich her growth as a member of a vibrant Navajo community and family. As a youngster she learns Diné bizaad, the Navajo language, so that she can communicate with other Navajo people. She also learns about k'é, defined as

⁸¹ I borrow Keith Basso's concept of "place [as] the object of awareness," from Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 55. In the Navajo language, hogan or hooghan is sometimes translated as "place home." Farina King, *The Earth Memory Compass: Diné Landscapes and Education in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 65-66; Craig Harris and Dennis Wagner, "A Sacred Place," in "To Build a Home: the Navajo Housing Tragedy," *Arizona Republic* (December 14, 2016), <http://www.azcentral.com/pages/interactives/navajo-housing/>.

clan relationships and a generous reciprocity that ties Diné people and their homeland to one another. From her grandparents, she learns important history in the form of ceremonies, like Blessingway, so that she can understand her connection to the Navajo past and the land around her.⁸²

In the afternoon, the family butchers one of her mother's sheep. Aneta's six brothers and four sisters eat their favorite parts of the mutton, and then go back to playing, leaving the clean-up and the hard work of drying the sheep skin to Aneta. She stretches, salts, and dries the hide, completing the first of a series of tasks to prepare the skins for sale at the local trading post. After drying two or three sheep hides this way, young Aneta makes her way down to the Shonto Canyon Trading Post. She sells the hides for candy, and begrudgingly shares the candy with her siblings—even though she did all the work.⁸³

If Aneta had grown up before 1934, before John Collier and the Indian New Deal led to the extermination of Navajo herds of sheep, horses, and goats—her parents might have hoped that Aneta would continue to accumulate wealth in the form of livestock until she owned her own large herd, just as her mother had done. But to a postwar Diné family, a pastoral future might have seemed less promising. By the 1960s, a combination of the federal government's livestock reduction policies and the deterioration of the Navajo range had impoverished formerly self-sufficient families. Although Aneta described her family as able to independently subsist through careful management of her mother's sheep herds and her father's garden, the parents seem to have shared the opinion, so widespread among postwar Diné, that scholastic education represented another desirable way of ensuring for

⁸² Narrative constructed from Aneta Whaley, interviewed by Jim M. Dandy, MSS OH 1174, 1990, LDS Native American Oral History Project, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library (HBLL), Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁸³ Whaley interview, 3.

their child's future. Aneta, or at least some of her siblings, might need to find a career outside of pastoralism to provide for themselves and their future families.⁸⁴

As Aneta and her “pet” goat munch on the candy, a pair of Latter-day Saint missionaries approaches the family's hogan, in a car purchased by the tithings of the faithful.⁸⁵ Aneta watches the dust cloud grow closer as the pair make their way slowly down the road to the Whaley hogans, the drive so rugged that one of the first Diné to own an automobile in the area became known as the “one that kind of bumped around in the car” in Diné bizaad.⁸⁶ The young men have weathered the scabrous terrain for the better part of the morning, driving from community to community, hoping to bear their testimonies of faith to any Navajo person who would listen. It's a tough sell, and the missionaries face stiff competition. Cold War-era fears of communism and heathenism have rekindled the fires of religious fervor among many bilagáana (white people), and like so many Navajos in the postwar period, Aneta's family has many churches vying for their attention. But the missionaries also come armed with a few unique tricks up their sleeves.

The Indian Student Placement Program would rank among these recruitment measures, as the program was widely touted as one that could provide “social, educational,

⁸⁴ Ibid. For a discussion of the role of sheep, goats, and passing down livestock to children in Diné society, see Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 81-102; and Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 263. Her parents chose to give Aneta such a considerable gift not only as a gesture of love and goodwill, but the goat also represented an investment in Aneta's future.

⁸⁵ Whaley interview, 3. The missionary periodical of the Southwest Indian Mission, *Indian Israel*, frequently cautioned the missionaries to be careful of damaging the “church-owned” car, so necessary for transportation across the sprawling Navajo Nation. See the pledge sheet in *Indian Israel*, March 1963, HBLI, Holbrook: Arizona.

⁸⁶ Whaley, interview, 2.

spiritual, and cultural opportunities” to Native youth so long as they underwent baptism.⁸⁷ Framed as a fulfillment of LDS prophecy that Indian people would soon resume a unique and important role in the church, the ISPP removed Native children for nine months out of the year, sending them to live with white Mormon host families across North America, but especially in parts of the American West with significant Mormon populations—Utah, Southern California, and parts of Oregon and Arizona. There, the children would attend public schools and church events alongside the host family’s biological children. In theory, the program united the interests of both the church and the Navajo child. For the church, placement would either strengthen a child’s relationship to the LDS gospel or add a fresh convert (and, possibly, their family) with potentially useful connections to encourage more Indigenous members to convert. Though church authorities claimed that they did not want the program co-opted as a missionary tool, missionaries under pressure to meet quotas often sought to sign up students who had no history with the church. As mission presidents reminded the young Saint proselytizers constantly, “sign-ups [for placement or other church Indian programs] are as good as baptisms.” The placement program played a role in facilitating conversions across the Navajo Nation and, broadly, Indian country as a whole. LDS officials like Golden Buchanan and Clare Bishop, who helped start the program, saw

⁸⁷ This is the slogan that was touted to both white LDS and Navajo communities alike—it appears in several placement films and many newspaper articles in Utah about the placement program. It seems that the phrase comes from an undated “Policies Regarding Requirements and Responsibilities, Prepared by the Indian Student Placement Program,” probably created in the early 1960s. See Clarence R. Bishop, “Indian Placement: A History of the Indian Student Placement Program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1960, 103. This statement of objectives is sometimes expanded to include “leadership abilities.” For an early example of newspapers citing this objective, see “Indian Students Absorbe [sic] White Man Education,” *Davis County Clipper*, 20 November 1964.

placement students as “leaders” who would open Indian communities to LDS missionaries and the gospel, showing how placement united humanitarian and religious interests.

For the family, the program could offer an education that did not require difficult travel to day schools, or the intolerance of the generally infamous boarding schools that brutally assimilated Native children. This was an education branded as exactly the same as what white, middle-class Mormons received in their own communities. Recruiters dangled the possibility of attending Brigham Young University after the placement program, as the church’s flagship institution of higher learning also featured the largest Native population of any US university during the program’s height in the early 1970s. In some instances, placement’s proselytizers made it seem as though the program offered a direct route to higher education.

Placement allowed for many Navajo participants to gain access to formal schooling and exposure to the English language—but these new experiences came at a cost. On its face, placement seems more humanitarian than other colonial education practices, like forced adoption and boarding schools. Indeed, placement departed from other late 20th century Indigenous child removal and adoption practices in that children could return home for three summer months (two in Canada), renewing their ties to their Indigenous family and community before leaving again. Similarly, as some scholars have pointed out, a student’s ability to leave the program after the year was over attests to a high degree of “Native direction” that other colonial educational projects lacked.⁸⁸ Yet each act of placement was simultaneously an act of displacement—representing a child’s separation from Native

⁸⁸ Megan Stanton, “The Indian Student Placement Program and Native Direction,” in *Essays on American Indian and Mormon History*, P. Jane Hafen and Brenden W. Rensink, eds. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019).

cultures, communities and families. In the final analysis, placement's goals and practices aligned with other assimilation projects even if it did not match them in destructive intent or degree. Like other child removal programs, placement still anticipated and sought to spur on the elimination of Indigeneity, defined as an Indigenous persons' connection to their lands and peoplehood.

This chapter investigates the church's purpose in conducting the Indian Student Placement Program, examining Native students' alternative options and reasons for embarking on placement. It explores promotional flip charts, brochures, and films intended to convince Native families to send children on placement, to enlist foster families to take the children in, and to explain placement's objectives to both audiences. Finally, the chapter takes a critical look at the initiation ceremonies that placement officials organized to "process" Native children and to ready them for placement. This "processing" stage of placement was not only about cleanliness and health—it also constituted an assault on the student's tribal identities. When the missionaries showed up on Aneta's doorstep, they spoke on behalf of a program that sought to alter Native children's relationship to Indigeneity.

With a pair of flip charts tucked under their arms, the proselytizers approached. At that time, few missionaries were fluent in the Navajo language, and the pictures in the flip chart represented a way to communicate information about the program even if the missionary was not conversant in Diné bizaad. The instructions for the flip chart note that "the presentation should be adapted to the local situation," varying the presentation for those who do not speak English and non-members. Presumably, this implied that missionaries should tone down the religious messages to non-members, emphasizing the educational aspects of the program (though any potential applicants would need to be

baptized prior to placement). The chart depicted a series of stages of placement, beginning with elementary schoolers in a spacious, well-lit classroom, then a white host brother teaching a placement student to throw a football, a high school graduation, and finally a pair of young Native people at Brigham Young University. Another image showed a Native scientist operating a complex microscope, a Native announcer broadcasting over the radio, and a group of Native men conducting business negotiations.⁸⁹

Later, as the church's recruitment tools became more complex, missionaries utilized film strips to get around potential language barriers. One such church production, *Day of Promise* (1967), depicted a Northern Cheyenne girl's fishing trip with her father, which was interrupted by a jet flying overhead. Over this imagery, the film's narrator makes use of a timeworn trope about Native people: "today finds most Indians caught between two worlds. . . a people suspended, belonging neither to the past, nor to the present."⁹⁰ During the Cold War, rhetoric around the separate "world" inhabited by Native people galvanized other child removal movements, where white families sought to "save" Indigenous children from supposedly impoverished and deficient families through child removal and adoption.⁹¹ Although phrased in a humanitarian-sounding way, schemes to force Indians to "adjust" to "modern life" sounded like assimilation by another name.⁹² Following the lead of such movements, *Day of Promise* also warned that Indians would soon be forced to "make the

⁸⁹ Quote from "Flip Chart Presentation: Indian Student Placement Program," AV 118866, circa 1960, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints History Library (CHL), Salt Lake City, 1.

⁹⁰ *Day of Promise* filmstrip, produced by Wenzel Whitaker, screenplay by Scott Whitaker and Carol Lynn Pearson, AV 4084, 1967, CHL.

⁹¹ Margaret Jacobs, *A Generation Removed*.

⁹² Daniel Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Native Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 27–28, 43–45.

inevitable adjustment to the white man's culture," and that placement could help them to make that change.⁹³

Church leaders commissioned films and radio broadcasts about the Indian Student Placement Program that sought to inform both the faithful and the uninitiated, though the church crafted its message to each audience differently. Still, all the films contained the underlying assumption that Indian communities and cultures were condemned to a rapidly vanishing past, while white LDS communities represented a potential bridge that Indian children could walk toward cultural, spiritual, and educational modernity. Latter-day Saint leaders like Spencer W. Kimball in the Indian Committee, tasked with overseeing placement, commissioned at least five informational films during the program's lifetime.⁹⁴ The films (and their radio versions) give historians a record of what types of appeals the church made to recruit Indian children into the program and to convince foster families to take the children into their homes. Frequently, the films communicated different ideas about placement depending on the target audience, demonstrating the committee's perception that convincing Indian and Anglo communities would require a distinct set of messages. There is evidence that many placement families watched the films in their wards (congregations) in Anglo-majority areas in Utah, Idaho, and later California, as well as at placement orientation

⁹³ *Day of Promise*, CHL.

⁹⁴ These include *Day of Promise*, *Exchange of Gifts*, *Just As Precious*, *Go My Son*, and *We Are Rich*. The films *Proud New Faces* and *Message to My People* probably also dealt with placement, but I've been unable to find them in the Church History Library archives. See note 15 for more detail. PBS also created a film about placement for their series about faith in the United States "Lamp Unto My Feet," which was called *Upon Their Shoulders*. It utilized scenes taken from the former church-commissioned films. Church leaders additionally promoted a special education program for disabled children through the seminaries. They called this radio broadcast *Kee's Long Walk*. Certainly, a great number of Latter-day Saint and non-Mormon Native people must have heard about the program through conversations and other unrecorded means, but these forms of information have not been preserved for historians.

meetings for would-be foster families.⁹⁵ To Anglo members, these movies sought to convey the spiritual and cultural blessings that awaited Mormons who accepted a removed child into their household. In the case of films directed toward a Native audience, the films were sent to wards and seminaries with significant Indian membership in the American Southwest.⁹⁶ These stressed the need for Native families to send their children out for placement so they might learn English and the “white man’s way,” and then return to help rescue their families from perceived reservation backwardness and spiritual decay. The church films provide definitive insight into how many families, Indian and non-Indian, encountered placement for the first time in significant detail. All the films demonstrate, on some level, an assumption of the eventual elimination of Indigeneity and the role that the placement program would play in that process.

Films that pandered to white Anglo LDS audiences, like the film *Exchange of Gifts* (circa 1968), appealed to white Mormons’ sense of altruistically helping Native people, in fulfillment not only of prophecy but also of a liberal, colorblind ideal. The production made religious appeals by calling on white Mormons to “respond to the Lord’s call to ‘feed my sheep,’” and promised that those who took children into their homes would “receive special

⁹⁵ The Lamanite Assistant Manuals, written for volunteer workers who would help placement social workers with large caseloads, suggests that not only might individual church congregations watch placement films; placement orientations often included at least one showing of *Day of Promise*. See Lamanite Assistant Manuals, Call no: M243.621 L214 197-?, available from online catalogue but restricted, CHL.

⁹⁶ For *Day of Promise* featuring at “Lamanite” seminaries across the Southwest, see Indian Student Placement Program Committee Minutes, July 23, 1968, 2, in Indian Student Placement Program files, 1950-1998, CR 245 2, CHL. In 1968, by request, *Day of Promise* was sent to the White Mountain Apache Tribe. See Indian Student Placement Program Committee Minutes, March 19, 1968, 2. A note in the James A McMurrin Papers, titled “Holbrook Ariz Mission” suggests that an “Elder [illegible]” ordered 120 copies of *Proud New Faces*, *Exchange of Gifts*, *Just as Precious*, and *Message to My People* sent to the mission, presumably so that missionaries could advertise the church’s “Lamanite” programs to members and to the curious. See James A. McMurrin Papers, Box 28, Folder 17, UA 552, HBLL, Provo, UT.

“blessings” on account of their service.⁹⁷ The student was to come into the household as “neither a servant nor guest,” but instead as “a member of the family,” to be viewed as no different than the family’s biological children. In constructing their message to potential host families, then, placement movies downplayed the separation of Native families and destruction of Indigenous cultures that placement caused and championed host families’ selfless generosity in uplifting the program’s participants.

Foster families would receive not only ecclesiastical benefits, but material privileges as well. Indeed, *Exchange of Gifts* claimed that a Latter-day Saint’s work with the “Lamanites” would naturalize their presence on Native land. “Because of your involvement,” the film promised, “the lands of the Americas will become the lands of your inheritance.”⁹⁸ By rephrasing this passage from the Book of Mormon to apply to the ISPP, *Exchange of Gifts* makes the argument that participation in the placement program would religiously sanction settler Saints’ rightful ownership of Indigenous lands.⁹⁹ While the church’s movie does not call for violence against Indigenous communities in order to take their lands from them, it does suggest a process by which white LDS people might rightfully inherit American lands after the violent act of dispossession. Such a vision therefore seeks to eliminate Indigeneity by denying that Native people have a singularly unique claim to lands that they have inhabited since time immemorial. This promise of inheritance through placement participation sets out a framework within which white settler occupation of Native territory

⁹⁷ “Exchange of Gifts: Under the Direction of the Church Indian Committee,” filmstrip, date unknown, CHL, call no.: 132918. Transcript in author’s notes.

⁹⁸ *Exchange of Gifts*, date unknown but circa 1968, CHL.

⁹⁹ The quote in question appears to rephrase a line from the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 10:18-19: “Wherefore, I will consecrate this land unto thy seed, and them who shall be numbered among thy seed, forever, for the land of their inheritance; for it is a choice land, saith God unto me, above all other lands, wherefore I shall have all men that dwell thereon that they shall worship me, saith God.”

could be justified. By proposing to erase the unique legitimacy of Native claims to land, placement's architects took aim at one key source of Indigeneity—that is, one's relationship to their homeland.

Meanwhile, films targeting Native audiences suggested that Placement represented an “opportunity” for Native children, one that would empower the students to enrich their Indigenous communities and families. Such films, such as *We Are Rich*, suggested that “we [Indian people] are rich in many ways: in our heritage, our background, our cultural education, and in our children. . . but if we want our children to lift our people, we need to give them opportunities.”¹⁰⁰ In both films, Indian children were presented as better off being incorporated into a Mormon home so that they could bring the modernizing, uplifting elements of Anglo language, culture, and economy back to their families. Other church promotional materials similarly suggested that the program would empower Native families, not devastate them: “this experience will teach your child many important things that will help strengthen your family. It will teach him to show love and respect for his parents and family members and to be proud of his Indian heritage.”¹⁰¹ Paradoxically, then, the church depicted removal as the best way to unite Indian families and removal from Native communities as the best way to make Indian youth proud of their heritage.

These promises to increase Native youths' pride in their birth community's traditions and culture also came into play in the films intended for Anglo-Mormon consumption, though it is clear that the church did not wish to inspire children to become more invested in their identities as Navajo, Havasupai, Apache, Lumbee, or any other particular tribal or

¹⁰⁰ *We Are Rich: Indian Student Placement Service*, filmstrip, 1980, CHL, call no: 316528. Those are my italics. Transcript in author's notes. *We Are Rich* had an audio version that could be played on radio as an advertisement for the program on the Navajo Nation.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 21.

national identity. Placement's architects did not even push for increasing participants' more general identification with the term "Indian." Instead, as *Exchange of Gifts* point out, the church sought to "restore" the "Lamanites" to an understanding of history as described by the Book of Mormon. As explored in the previous chapter, Saints widely perceived Indians as the descendants of an Israelite remnant that had fled Europe around 600 BCE, who forgot "the truth" of their biblical inheritance and blessings after exterminating the continent's lighter-skinned inhabitants, the Nephites. Therefore, placement's architects *did* seek to unite Indian families and communities, but not around their own self-understandings and relationships to land. Instead, the ISPP was envisioned as a program to supplant specific Indigenous self-conceptions with a "Lamanite" identity commensurate with the Church's teachings.

We Are Rich, intended for Native audiences, may have painted a less grim picture of the deficiency of Native families than "Exchange of Gifts," but ultimately both films emphasized the need for Indian youth to learn "the White man's way" in order to survive. Among church-directed placement films, the film *Day of Promise* was an outlier, because it was intended for and sent to both Native and non-Native audiences. *Day of Promise* traces two fictional placement students, Julie and Hobson, "dependent" Indians who are "suddenly pushed forward hundreds of years" by the Indian Student Placement Program.¹⁰² The film presents each experience they have in their host communities through a rose-tinted lens. Their adjustment to the foster home is challenging at first, but in the "hands of generous,

¹⁰² In the film, Hobson is from the White Mountain Apache tribe, and Julie is a Northern Cheyenne person.

devoted foster parents,” they receive “the opportunity to fulfill their dreams.”¹⁰³ While placement surely offered some Native children what placement officials considered a “typical” education experience in public school and fluency in the English language, this obscures the significant trade-offs Native students endured on placement, especially in terms of maintaining the languages and cultural practices that they had learned in their natal communities.¹⁰⁴ It also assumes that all placements were completely voluntary, a premise that, as I explored in the previous chapter, proves faulty in at least some cases. Nonetheless, in the film the experience of placement also leads both Hobson and Julie to become even more devoted to their faith, without compromising their devotion to their natal communities. All too often, though, this cheery depiction of having the best of both worlds fell flat, as removal and placement frequently fueled hardship and conflict within the student’s biological family.

As a young man, Hobson learns “how to honorably bear his priesthood, so that in later years as head of the family, he will be prepared to baptize his own children, assume positions of responsibility, and in all ways, be an able leader.” As a young woman, Julie’s religious instruction merits no specific mention, as Mormon women, even today, cannot hold the priesthood.¹⁰⁵ Yet both have an important responsibility to go home “and raise the living standards of their own people,” a task that Julie and Hobson diligently accept over the

¹⁰³ In a strange twist, Julie is said to miss the natural environment—“the smell of the pine forest and the cool of the mountain lake”—but no mention is made of a longing for her natal family and community. In any case, both Hobson and Julie rapidly adjust their foster homes and family, and Hobson soon begins learning “the secrets of modern agriculture.”

¹⁰⁴ That is, for those who did not speak English already—predominantly the case for Navajo children growing up in households where the Navajo language, *Diné bizaad*, was the primary language.

¹⁰⁵ As the historian D. Michael Quinn has shown, there do appear to be recorded cases where women held the priesthood in early Mormonism, though the LDS Church no longer bestows such blessings upon women today. See Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994).

course of the summer, when they are permitted by the program to return to their families in tribal communities. After graduation, Julie attends Brigham Young University, while Hobson goes on a mission for two years “to teach his brothers and sisters the inspired words of their forefathers.” The film ends when Julie and Hobson are married in the temple, where a temple marriage is both a status symbol and assurance that they will receive the faith’s highest blessings. Ultimately, the film portrays Julie and Hobson’s removal from their community as an uplifting act “exemplifying true Christianity,” again emphasizing the generosity of placement host families over the unity and integrity of Indian families.¹⁰⁶ Together, they have escaped the “simplicity and solitude” of reservation life, dependent on “the coaxing of a bare subsistence from the land.” Instead, they take advantage of the “educational, spiritual, social, and cultural advantages in non-Indian community life” in order to join “today’s world.”¹⁰⁷ The film therefore depicted Julie and Hobson’s removal from a “doomed” Indian past to be an unfortunate but ultimately necessary first step into Mormon modernity.

In sum, placement radio broadcasts, films, and flip charts can show historians how missionaries like the two that approached Aneta’s house would have sought to recruit children. The films minimized the effects of removal on the integrity of the Native family and community while stressing the modernizing opportunities available to children who participated in the placement program. Similarly, the films targeting would-be foster families played on tropes of a white savior rescuing Native children from backwardness, all while ensuring for themselves spiritual benefits and a sense of legitimacy in “inheriting” Native

¹⁰⁶ Indeed, an astute viewer of the film will notice that when the two are married, Julie and Hobson’s host families are present at the ceremony, but their biological parents are absent.

¹⁰⁷ All quotes from “Day of Promise” filmstrip, 1967, CHL.

land. The films provide a valuable means of reconstructing how church leaders involved in placement would have the program presented to potential participants, and how they conceived of Native people as “vanishing” and therefore in need of assistance.

However, it is unclear just how successful these films were in recruiting Indigenous children or host families. In her overview of the largest set of oral histories on placement host families (now missing from the L. Tom Perry Special Collections of BYU), Jessie L. Embry argues that the main reason “foster” families accepted a placement student was because a church leader had asked them to do so.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, it seems that Native students, or at least one of their parents, chose placement because they valued education, and the program seemed the least undesirable choice in a set of unenviable options—all of which would separate them from their children. Despite its treaty assurances to the contrary in the aftermath of Hwéeldi, the federal government had by the late twentieth century failed to make good on its promises to build a sufficient number of reservation day schools on Diné Bikéyah. As a result, the ISPP, nine-month boarding schools across the country, or hours-long bus rides to day schools represented most families’ only options to formally educate their children. As I explore in the next chapter, some Navajos chose placement because it offered a way for families impoverished by federal policy and the legacy of livestock reduction to ensure that their children would get enough to eat. Families that joined the church prior to sending their children on placement might also have had religious reasons for putting their children on the program.

¹⁰⁸ The other two primary reasons a foster family agreed were “because they felt the scriptures told them to,” and “because they felt a special love for the Native Americans and hoped to improve their lives.” Jessie L. Embry, “Indian Placement Program Host Families: A Mission to the Lamanites,” *Journal of Mormon History* 40 no. 2 (Spring 2014): 237.

Of all these options, though, the most frequently cited reason for choosing placement was the absence of other desirable educational opportunities. Before going on placement, prospective students might have spent time in a boarding school, like Crownpoint Indian School in New Mexico, Leupp Boarding School in Arizona, or even the church-run Intermountain Indian School (founded in 1949) in Brigham, Utah, some of which sought to assimilate Indian children using brutal tactics. As Rose M. Jakub described of her experience in boarding school, teachers sought to prevent Navajo students from speaking to one another in Diné bizaad. They would punish those who spoke Navajo by giving the students soap “to chew on,” or slap them on the wrists with rulers.¹⁰⁹ Jim Dandy, also Navajo, compared his time at a boarding school in Tuba City unfavorably to the time he spent in prison. Officials at the school disrespected him and Navajo cultural integrity by shearing his ritually important long hair into a “GI haircut.” While James was free to bodily self-determination at home among family members, the boarding school forced uniformity by giving everyone the same shaved head and coveralls.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Donald Mose recalled that his mother “was never quite pleased” with the nearby boarding school in Pinon, Arizona, and so was enticed to put her son on placement so that he would avoid the corporal punishments and dehumanizing experiences associated with boarding school.¹¹¹ Perhaps most horrifically, boarding school students often observed that the schools were a tool to sever them from their families and Native communities. At missionary-run boarding schools, religion could serve as both method and justification for suppressing Native culture.

¹⁰⁹ Rose M. Jakub, interviewed by Farina King, 2008, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL, 2.

¹¹⁰ James Lee Dandy, interviewed by Jessie L. Embry, MSS OH 1198, 1990, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL, 2.

¹¹¹ Donald Mose, interviewed by Jim M. Dandy, MSS OH 1165, May 17, 1990, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL, 2.

As Ernesteen B. Lynch reported of her experience at such a school in Shiprock: “I soon began to realize that it was that very way of life [the Navajo life] that the missionaries wanted me to forget about. They wanted to put Jesus as the center of my life. . . they wanted Jesus to be the culture of everyone’s life.”¹¹²

Despite the traumas and travails of a boarding school experience that were all too frequently designed to eliminate a child’s relationship to their Indigenous language and customs, the presence of other Native children allowed students to form a community. “We had this whole underground system where we talked about things that were Navajo,” Lynch noted, “we talked about things that made the Navajos different than the white people.”¹¹³ Despite the quotidian violence and dehumanizing experiences that boarding school students might be subjected to, other Native students helped them to hold on to their sense of self and community throughout the process. On the other hand, the placement program succeeded at creating a level of compartmentalization that the most assimilationist boarding school director could only have dreamt of. Even if the church portrayed the program as more personalized and caring than the rough and potentially dehumanizing treatment students might experience in boarding school, placement’s administrators applauded themselves for having created a program that assimilated its participants far faster than a boarding school.¹¹⁴ Despite the significant differences between placement and boarding

¹¹² Ernesteen B. Lynch, interviewed by Jessie L. Embry, 1990, MSS OH 1488, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL, 8.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Leroy Adams, superintendent of the Navajo Boarding School in Richfield, Utah, wrote to Miles Jensen that “I am definitely sold on your program.” He goes on: “in the short time they have been in the homes they have completely transformed mentally, physically, socially, and educationally,” and that he was surprised “to realize the progress these children make in so short a time.” If the Indian children were to become “useful citizens,” then “they can never receive that type of education on the reservation or in the isolated segregated [sic.] Indian communities.” Leroy Adams, letter addressed to

school, both shared the same operating logic—the elimination of the student’s indigeneity and their absorption as “useful citizens” into a white social body.¹¹⁵

Just like placement, however, boarding schools were also increasingly complex, hybridized institutions that could have many outcomes for students, so one must be careful not to overgeneralize. The boarding school environment allowed for some former students to return as teachers and administrators. Many of these reformers entered boarding schools that used to be models of Indigenous elimination and assimilation and made them accountable to a community’s interests. Ernesteen B. Lynch, noted above, was herself a reformer when she went to Rough Rock Demonstration School (in Arizona) as a Diné bizaad language instructor. While administrators in her own boarding school experience had sought to sever her connection with the Navajo language, the experimental boarding school at Rough Rock gave her an opportunity to return to Navajo country to pass her generationally received linguistic knowledge to youngsters. In contrast, despite placement’s benevolent and humanitarian rhetoric, students who spent many years in the program tended not to be filled with a burning desire to return to their communities as leaders to the “Lamanite people”—instead, those with many years in placement often stayed in white Mormon country, or started families in Utah, like the communities that Native people built in Cache County.¹¹⁶

Besides the mistrust of federal boarding schools, material considerations could also play into a family’s decision to send children on placement. This was especially true for poor families who sought to feed their children. For the Zendejas family in Omaha, who

Mr. Miles Jensen, April 2, 1956, Indian Student Placement Program Files, Scrapbook Labeled “Indians,” 1954-1958, CHL.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Lynette Riggs, personal correspondence.

converted to and practiced Mormonism for two years before the church's 1970s austerity measures led to the end of their majority-Native "Lamanite" ward, placement may have seemed a manner of ensuring that their children got three meals a day. One of their children, Edouardo Zendejas, recalled growing up in a low-income neighborhood in Omaha and eating for the first time every day when he would receive school lunch. In contrast, on placement he was able to see "the lifestyle of how [middle-class] families actually live. I guess it was the all-American family with a five-bedroom house, a den, and three or four bathrooms around."¹¹⁷

Indian families that practiced Mormonism also chose to send their children on placement to fulfill spiritual obligations. Lynette Riggs has argued through interviews with host families and personal experience that many white Mormons felt pressured to take Native children into their homes, even if they lacked the financial capacity to do so.¹¹⁸ Because Latter-day Saints believe in an individual's ongoing personal contact with and revelations from God, refusing a church leader's request to accept a placement student was akin to refusing a request from God. Similarly, Indigenous members of the church seem to have felt that they needed to send their children on placement so that the children could become better Mormons and gain a "stronger testimony in the church."¹¹⁹ Of course, in cases where the Native parents were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, then the children might just as easily learn their family's faith without being subjected

¹¹⁷ Edouardo Zondajas [sic], interviewed by Malcom T. Pappan, MSS OH 1144, HBLL, 3. At the time of the writing of this thesis, the interviewee's name is misspelled both in the official copy of the interview and the HBLL online catalogue. The interviewee's name is Edouardo Zendejas—not 'Zondajas'—but I have included the error in this citation so that interested researchers may find it.

¹¹⁸ Lynette A. Riggs, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Indian Placement Service: A History" (PhD diss., Utah State University, 2008).

¹¹⁹ Belinda Boone Letters, CHL.

to the hardships of removal. In fact, to many observers, the church's placement program's separation of families seemed to contradict the church's centering of families.¹²⁰ What inspired missionaries to remove children?

To begin with, missionaries could use placement as a recruiting tool, and in turn received incentives for signing children up for placement. As the Navajo Jimmy Benally, a Diné man, observed about his mission: "I would say ninety percent of the kids were baptized to go on placement rather than baptized into the Church. I learned that on my mission. We always had a quota for how many kids we had to get on Placement."¹²¹ Ronald Singer, a Navajo missionary who had participated in the ISPP in California, similarly noticed that much of his labor was directed towards "signing up kids for placement."¹²² When asked in an interview what interested Native Americans about the LDS Church, Lewis Singer replied that some Native people joined "so they can get their kids on the Church Placement Program."¹²³ Students of any age, even infants, seem to have been placed between 1947 and the program's legally official beginning in 1954, at which time students were required to be at least six years old. In 1963, under pressure from the Navajo tribal council and the federal government, the church increased the minimum age of placement to eight. In addition to the requirement that placement participants were required to undergo baptism prior to leaving for the program, the students also had to "live LDS standards," including following the LDS

¹²⁰ For examples, see Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, "The Kids Go Out Navaho and Come Back Donny and Marie: the Mormons' Controversial Save-Our-Indians Program," *Los Angeles Magazine*, December, 1979.

¹²¹ Jimmy Benally, interviewed by Odessa Neaman, MSS OH 1176, 1990, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL, 3.

¹²² Ronald L. Singer, interviewed by Odessa Neaman, MSS OH 1185, 1990, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL, 12.

¹²³ Lewis Singer, interviewed by Jim M. Dandy, October 23, 1990, MSS OH 1185, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL, 3. He also describes "special get togethers for just the Indian Placement students."

“word of wisdom” by abstaining from alcohol, cigarettes, coffee, and tea.¹²⁴ Finally, placement participants would have had to have been considered racially Indian, understood by case workers in terms of blood quantum, or an individual’s portion of Indian “blood.” Even for Indians who were deemed Indian enough, restrictions were sometimes drawn around the perception of other nonwhite bloodlines in the student. In 1968, “[Placement director Clare] Bishop visited Owyhee, Nevada, and found the Indian children in question had 1/64 Negro blood. They will not qualify for the placement program.”¹²⁵ And later, it was reported that “Sister Silver will officially visit the Owyhee Reservation in Nevada next week and try to learn more about the problem concerning Negro blood among these Indian people.”¹²⁶ Such instances of racism in determining placement eligibility might have been linked to the church’s denial of the priesthood to Black men (it would take another ten years after Sister Silver’s visit to the Owyhee Reservation for the First Presidency to announce in a 1978 Revelation that African American men would again be allowed to hold the priesthood).¹²⁷

Edouardo Zendejas, member of the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska and himself a former placement student, later served as a volunteer coordinator for the program. He thought placement’s role in breaking up Native “family unit[s]” may have gone “counter to some of the teachings of the Church,” but maintained it was necessary to remove some Indigenous

¹²⁴ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Foster Parent Guide*, 1965, HBLL.

¹²⁵ ISPC Minutes, August 6, 1968, 1.

¹²⁶ ISPC Minutes, October 1, 1968, 1.

¹²⁷ As the historian W. Paul Reeve has shown, early Mormon patriarchs had anointed Black men like Elijah Abel to the Melchizedek Priesthood. In fact, the Prophet Joseph Smith’s father performed at least one of these anointment ceremonies, implying the Prophet himself condoned granting the priesthood to African American men. The priesthood would be more deeply racialized later in the faith’s history, when the Saints invaded the Great Basin under the leadership of Brigham Young. See Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Struggle for Mormon Whiteness*, (New York: Oxford University, 2015).

children early. “When they’re around ten, eleven, or twelve, they’re pretty impressionable,” he notes, but by the time they turn fourteen and fifteen, “some of them are pregnant,” and “they are using drugs and alcohol.”¹²⁸ Such attitudes were by no means unique to placement, since many postwar removal justifications relied on the trope of deficient Native families. Such framings argued that alcoholism and a “culture of poverty” contributed to Indigenous parents’ absenteeism, where older children, grandparents and other caregivers from outside the nuclear family would help to rear children. In some cases, Zendejas claimed that “twelve year old kids are already babysitting their younger brothers and sisters over the weekend while their mom’s out getting drunk and spending the welfare check.”¹²⁹ Even though alcoholism, poverty, and underaged pregnancy were by no means problems that affected only Native communities, as Margaret Jacobs has shown, these served as a blanket rationale for reformers to advocate for child removal in the postwar world. Along similar lines, the church usually deemed the nuclear family as the only legitimate way to raise children, which conflicted with Indian and especially Navajo child-rearing practices where living with and receiving care from a grandparent or other relative was not only acceptable but desirable.¹³⁰ In such cases, removal not only separated Indigenous children from their grandparents, but prevented them from having easy access to the elders’ generational knowledge of Indigenous languages, customs, and history.

The church’s requirement to obtain at least one parent’s signature before removing a child reflected the faith’s refusal to acknowledge the authority of caregivers outside the nuclear family. In many cases, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or other individuals who spent

¹²⁸ Zondajas [sic] interview, first two quotes from page 8, second two from page 7.

¹²⁹ Zondajas [sic.] interview, 8.

¹³⁰ Margaret Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 88-91.

time with the families did not need to be consulted for a child to be sent off on placement. In other cases, however, extra-nuclear family members reluctantly agreed that placement was necessary. Even though caretakers in Indian communities did not want the children they loved to leave for nine months out of the year, the oral histories reflect that extended families had to make painful and pragmatic choices to ensure the children could receive formal education in unideal circumstances. Julius Ray Chavez remembered that he entered the program “under protest,” since he had been living with his grandmother, and “wanted to learn more of our people.” He came home to find his bags packed one night, and his biological mother had signed him up to leave in the morning on one of the church’s chartered buses. Even though Chavez begged to let him stay, his grandmother supported her daughter’s decision, but told him to remember the Diné imprisonment at Hweéldi, or Bosque Redondo, after the Long Walk:

You have to go. Remember what I told you of how our people were released from captivity. It was under [those] conditions that we sent our children to school. That’s written on paper to this day with the white man. Even if you don’t want to go you have to because it’s written on paper. One day you’ll be able to read that because you will have gone up there. . . I didn’t get an education, but for you this has to happen.¹³¹

Similarly, Lemuel Pedro recalls living with his grandmother and cousins for many of his early years, prior to going on placement.¹³² Emery Bowman recalls missing his grandparents the most while on placement, because he used to live with them. “I missed having somebody to teach me. . . I missed while we were eating breakfast having someone talk to me in Navajo and teach me about why it was important for me to be going to school.

¹³¹ Julius Ray Chavez, interviewed by Odessa Neaman, MSS OH 1180, 27 June 1990, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL, 8.

¹³² Lemuel Pedro, interviewed by Malcom T. Pappan, MSS OH 1146, 1 April 1990, LDS Native American Oral History Program, HBLL, 2.

With my foster parents, we got up in the morning, had family prayer, and everybody scattered.”¹³³ “It was hard to get used to that,” Bowman conceded, because he had grown accustomed to constant care and guidance from his grandparents. Children removed for placement might have received a great deal of love and support from the adults in their natal community. Yet the fact that these expressions of care, love, and generational knowledge transfer came from outside of the child’s nuclear family made the caregiving illegible to white LDS proponents of child removal. Ironically, Bowman left an environment of adult supervision and support on the Navajo Nation for an Anglo environment where only foster brothers and sisters remained in the home during the day.¹³⁴

The Indian Placement Program was therefore not only a childcare and educational program, but also a coordinated effort to remove children from their homes and families, to distance them from Native customs, identities, and languages. For nine months out of the year, they lost their direct ability to interact with Indian caregivers, limiting the transfer of generational knowledge. For the Navajo students who made up the majority of placement’s participants, placement meant leaving behind the four sacred mountains that anchored the children to their homelands.¹³⁵ While the church reluctantly recognized that placement would require sacrifice on the part of Indigenous communities and children, it also argued that the hardships would be well worth it. Surviving records reveal that church authorities imagined placement in a white foster family as a way to rescue Indigenous children from “doomed” Native ways by instructing them in the “modern” lifestyles of white Mormons.

¹³³ Emery Bowman, interviewed by Deborah Lewis, MSS OH 1152, 27 January 1989, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL, 12.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 13. Rhonda J. Lee also reports living with her grandmother Lee throughout most of her childhood while she was attending a school in Shiprock, New Mexico. See Lee, interviewed by Jim M. Dandy, MSS OH 1197, 10 April 1991, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL.

¹³⁵ See King, *The Earth Memory Compass*, 2018.

Ultimately, then, placement operated along a logic that deemed inevitable the erasure of Indigenous modes of self-identity.

After removal by missionaries or social workers, the first step in the transition to white LDS life was “processing,” in which Mormon administrators sought to prepare the students for placement. As an institutionalized endeavor overseen directly by church leaders like Spencer W. Kimball, Belle Spafford, and Clare Bishop, “processing” shows how the program’s anticipated decline of Indigeneity worked out in administrative practice. Unlike later stages of placement, “processing” was less reliant on individual families, and therefore more closely resembled a bureaucratic machine built not only to ready students for placement, but also to accomplish a key first step in distancing them from Indigeneity.

Elise Boxer has shown that Helen John’s early experiences prior to entering the Buchanan household in 1947 anticipated the processing ordeal. Before Helen entered the house, Amy Avery scrubbed the young Navajo woman down in the tub, then dressed her in “American clothes” from the wardrobe of Amy’s daughter. She also cut Helen’s hair. Years later, Golden Buchanan recalled the trauma of this transformation: “I’ll always remember how terribly pained Helen was when she looked at herself without her hair. That was I’m sure a traumatic experience for her, because in her culture that was something to be prized.”¹³⁶ Boxer argues that this ritual to prepare Helen for her placement in the Buchanan household was not only about hygiene—instead, this “civilizing project” distanced her from looking Indian.¹³⁷ Rituals that inaugurated an Indian person’s arrival in the white community by altering their physical appearance were not unique to placement, Mormon indenturers in

¹³⁶ Golden R. Buchanan, interviewed by William G. Hartley, MSS 10505, 1974-1975, James Moyle Oral History Program, CHL, 13.

¹³⁷ Elise Boxer, “The Lamanites Shall Blossom as the Rose: The Indian Student Placement Program, Mormon Whiteness, and Indigenous Identity,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41 no. 4 (2015): 147.

the nineteenth century also changed their captives' dress, cut their hair, and even burned their original clothing.¹³⁸

These practices were carried on formally through the advent of “processing.” After recruitment, placement students travel to their respective placement communities, usually on buses commissioned by the church. After that, the students would undergo “processing,” an initiation ceremony that involved healthcare checkups, pregnancy tests, and the student’s first orientation into the gendered, cultural, and religious expectations of living in a predominantly Anglo-Mormon community. For most Navajos, the removal buses drove through the night to facilities set up at public reception centers, staffed with medical personnel and relief society women who volunteered to receive the children. The host families would also come to some of the processing meetings, and at the end of this “placement orientation” the foster families drove home with a Native child who was to spend the next nine months in their home. The experience of “processing” marked the first stage in a process that severed Native children from their homes and identities, just as it served to prepare them for a new life in a white family.

Between 1947 and 1953—before the church made the placement program official—stake leaders removing children would process them in their own homes before sending them on to their host families. Official recognition of the program brought further complexity. When the Brethren of the Quorum of the Twelve consented to have the Relief Society begin directing Placement in 1953, the church expanded “processing.” Official recognition led to new invasive medical examinations, the creation of new orientation material, and greater surveillance of placement participants and their host families. The

¹³⁸ Brian Q. Cannon, “‘To Buy Up the Lamanite Children as Fast as They Could’: Indentured Servitude and Its Legacy in Mormon Society,” *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no. 2 (2018): 1-35.

church set up the largest processing center at the Brigham Young University campus in Provo, on the heritage lands of the Timpanogos Utes. Relief Society chapters also started facilities in Salt Lake City and Ogden to limit the distance that host families needed to drive to pick up their students. By the heyday of the program in the 1970s, around the time when Aneta would have gone on placement, “processing” went something like this: buses chartered by the church gathered youth from their natal communities in the Southwest and carried the passengers through the night into so-called processing centers. At first, no adult chaperones save the driver attended the children, so that an already emotional trip could become a dangerous one. Placement alumni recall children sobbing on the bus, calling out for their parents. They arrived in the early morning at the processing center, exhausted from driving through the night.

In 1955, Richfield gained the first “reception” center for Indigenous students out for placement in Mormon homes, with other “processing” facilities to follow. There, new placement students received their first initiations into what Mormons considered ideal values of “humility, devotion, loyalty, bodily cleanliness, manners and general deportment.”¹³⁹ Even before the advent of formal processing, removers took pains to render removal illegible to tribal or federal authorities that might criticize their activities, scaffolding the “processing” stage that would come to define children’s early placement experiences when the program received official sanction in 1947. During this time, chief child remover Miles Jensen characterized his own activities prior to 1954 as “unethical” and certainly “illegal,” which seems a fair assessment. He owned the trucks he used to remove children, and set up his

¹³⁹ Golden R. Buchanan, “The ‘Outing Program’ as it Has Developed,” Indian Committee Correspondence, 1941-1952, Church History Library (CHL), Salt Lake City, Utah. 3.

“own insurance company,” drawing from his investments as collateral at \$150 a vehicle.¹⁴⁰ When Kimball established the official program, Jensen kept the collateral and the accrued interest, enriching himself upon the funds of child removal. He also recalled operating in clandestine ways to avoid detection from federal and tribal authorities, following direct instructions from Kimball. The president once advised Jensen that “if it [placement] works we’ll love you for it,” but that “if anything happens, you’re on your own.”¹⁴¹ The early informal years of placement have unfortunately left no paper trail outside of Jensen’s account to determine just how voluntary the placements were, but the number of Native infants “acquired” by missionaries reminds one of the rhetoric employed by Mormon indenturers almost a century earlier. At the very least, we have one documented instance of Jensen refusing to comply with community desires. Around 1950, a Native woman halted Jensen’s bus—full of removed children—asking to see the so-called social worker’s papers to take the children off the reservation. Jensen told her to jump into the Colorado River.¹⁴²

Upon arrival at the processing center, the students were separated by sex, and then “bathed and shampooed and made ready for the clinic.” Observing the first batch of students to arrive at the Richfield reception center in 1955, Belle Spafford commented that the “frightened” children had “no problem with discipline at all,” since they “didn’t know what we were going to do to them.” Such a comment reflects not only the fear that removal imposed, but also that fear’s potential usefulness to placement’s architects. Here, we get a rare glimpse of how processing centers did not serve only the utilitarian function of

¹⁴⁰ Miles Herbert Jensen Dictation, 1973, p. 11, typescript, the James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (CHL), Salt Lake City, Utah, 11.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴² Jensen dictation, 6-10.

screening for tuberculosis, but also sought to ready students for placement in more intrusive and disturbing ways, like preparing them to obey authority. In a later speech about the Richfield reception center in 1955, Kimball emphasized the selflessness of the doctors, the Relief Society women, and even the “generous linen company” that furnished towels to dry the children with. He neglected to mention how the experience of processing might amplify the suffering of students, who had been separated from their families and homes only the previous evening. Instead, in Kimball’s view, “sweet, sympathetic women” quiet their fears, so that Indian children would “come to know that this is for their own good.”¹⁴³ In Kimball and Spafford’s view, then, processing was the first step in disciplining Indigenous children, so that they might be more easily transformed by the program into “Lamanites.”

The lead physician in the early processing centers, Dr. Hansen, observed that “the children become quite antagonistic” when they had their blood taken to check for anemia, but ultimately decided that until an alternative was found, “there is no choice but to go ahead and stick their veins.” Dr. Hansen and the other processors may have been left with no choice but to check the children’s blood, but it would have been easy to approach the blood tests with a greater degree of attention to Native students’ needs. No evidence suggests that processors took the time to explain why they took blood, why they conducted in-depth and invasive examinations of the children’s bodies, or why they cut hair to match the gendered styles of white, middle-class Mormons. The limited accounts we have of alumni experiences suggest that processing felt dehumanizing, and that they were treated like animals. “I felt like I was being tagged and printed and branded,” one former student

¹⁴³ Spencer W. Kimball, “The Dawning of a Brighter Day,”⁴ Speech at the 127th Semi-Annual General conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, from “The Lamanites: People of the First Covenant,” compiled by Elder Spencer W. Kimball, 1956, CHL, CR 603 10; Spafford interview, 225, 1975-1976.

recalled.¹⁴⁴ Another participant and later member of the Quorum of the Fifty George P. Lee describes the experience of having a bowl placed over his head to trim his hair, before boarding the night bus. While the physical transformations that processing wrought may have fulfilled hygienic functions on the surface, they also distanced the children from Native identities by making them look less Indian, similar to the boarding school practices mentioned earlier.

Even seemingly innocuous types of processing, like washing the children, could take on disturbing and dehumanizing meanings when viewed from a more critical lens. An image from the Mount Ogden Stake Women's Relief Society scrapbook depicts adult volunteers dressed in something resembling a make-shift hazmat suit, preparing to bathe recently arrived Native children at the processing center. The picture shows the women wear shower caps over their hair and ponchos over their midsections. Perhaps the women might have worried about contracting tuberculosis from the students—but look closely—their hands and mouths are uncovered. They were probably washing the children using a shower rather than a bath, so that the adult also got soaked from head to toe by the water. One wonders why these women would need to stand so close to the child, controlling every aspect of a ritual that in other contexts might be considered intimate and personal rather than deeply intrusive and public. Whether the volunteers feared disease or getting wet, the caps and ponchos were clearly intended to create a barrier between the Relief Society women and the Native youth they were charged with bathing. Why not allow the children to wash themselves, in order to ensure that they felt more comfortable after being removed from their families? The choice to wash children in groups, all while wearing clothing that

¹⁴⁴ Margaret Wauneka [pseudonym], interviewed by Tona Hangen, August 9, 1991, Tuba City, Arizona. Cited in Garrett, *Making Lamanites*, 96.

distanced the processor from the processed, reveals at best a racist belief in the incapability of Indian children to wash themselves, and at worst a desire to control and to remake.



Figure 2. Relief Society Women Bathing Incoming Placement Students. Source: Mount Ogden Stake, "Mount Ogden Stake Relief Society History, 1953-1970," LR 5819 34, CHL.

After the initial medical examinations, days of orientation seminars would follow. The host families were separated from the placement students and shown films about white conceptions of "Indian culture," designed to help the families deal more effectively with the "cultural conflict" that processors thought the Native youth might experience. Such training served as a means of reinforcing tropes that the parents may already have internalized in more scientific-sounding language. The students might act in ways that the host family

deemed undesirable, but parents were instructed that this had nothing to do with removal or the family's own actions. Instead, conflict should be interpreted as owing to "the adverse effects that poverty, insecurity, feeling of inferiority, and resentment has had on Indian youth." The parents would next attend workshops on "the importance of discipline and some methods of administering it." Officials therefore encouraged parents to perceive signs of homesickness and emotional hardship as essential Indigenous characteristics that "Indian youth" had learned from less-than-ideal upbringings in Native families. Such a view encouraged a paternalistic mentality that led foster parents to limit the Native students' ability to return or call home to interact with their biological families, and instead sought to instill new, 'modern' Anglo-Mormon values to replace the deficiencies of Indigeneity.

Officials also established a gendered processing system in order to ready students for life in a white Latter-day Saint community. The host parents and students, separated by sex, went together to a series of talks on gendered expectations for behavior:

Girl's Division:

1. Personal Cleanliness
2. Care of foundation garments
3. Menstruation
4. Teeth
5. Make - up
6. Word of Wisdom
7. Maturation
8. Other items as seen fit

Boy's Division:

1. Personal cleanliness
2. Care of clothing
3. Masturbation
4. Word of Wisdom
5. Maturation

6. Other items as seen fit¹⁴⁵

Just as processing's bathing rituals implied that Native youth needed assistance in order to clean themselves, the orientation seminars seem to have assumed that placement participants came as blank tablets waiting to be filled with Mormon gender ideology. Processors therefore ignored whatever pre-existing knowledge that Native youth might have learned from their family or community. The orientation plan found it necessary to instruct Native girls in taking care of their teeth and make-up, while such aesthetic activities were apparently deemed less useful for the boys. As mentioned before, the "Word of Wisdom" in both divisions refers to a passage from the Doctrine and Covenants, which many Latter-day Saints understand as a requirement to abstain from coffee, alcohol, cigarettes, and tea.

Early processing centers also exposed adolescent women to "frog" tests to check for unplanned pregnancy. In this invasive examination, processors took a young woman's urine sample and injected it into a female African clawed frog, *Xenopus laevis*. In the presence of hormones that might indicate pregnancy in women, the frog will begin to develop eggs just a few hours after exposure. According to the 1957 minutes of the Indian Placement Committee, "Brother Jensen and Dr. Hansen had selected a few young girls of childbearing age to do frog tests," in order "to see if there are any Illegitimate pregnancies creeping in." Hansen wanted the tests to become standard practice at all reception centers in 1958, but the test was never officially instituted. It seems likely that the prohibitive costs of the frog tests—and not ethics—prevented their widespread adoption. After all, the document seems to suggest that Jensen and Hansen did not randomly select young women for frog testing.

¹⁴⁵ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Foster Parent Orientation Seminar," 11-14, in *Lamanite Assistant Manuals*, M243.621 L214 197-?. Apparently, the assumption is that masturbation is either a boys-only activity, or an issue only when boys practice it.

Did the processors instead single out women that they considered more ‘promiscuous’ to undergo the pregnancy tests, as the committee’s minutes imply? Either way, the document features an alarming absence of any evidence that the young women consented to have their bodies tested. It appears that Hansen and Jensen did not even inform the women what the examination was designed to find. The test lays bare not only Mormon desires to police women’s sexuality, but also assumptions that Native women’s return to their natal communities might result in unplanned pregnancy. Hansen never proposed a pregnancy test at the end of placement, for women returning home after spending time in white Mormon towns. Therefore, processing was designed not only to protect Mormon host families from tuberculosis and other contagious diseases, but from the social danger of having a ‘foster daughter’ who was assumed to have violated the gendered ideals of a woman’s chastity.¹⁴⁶

In sum, the ordeal of processing initiated students into the next nine months of their lives within white Anglo-Mormon homes and communities. However, even as the initiation ritual readied students for placement, it also solidified their displacement from their Native cultures and families. Processing shows administrators’ efforts to transform Native participants to ready them for life in white host families also distanced them from their birth families.

Conclusion

Even as placement’s architects envisioned a slow, partial degradation of Native ties to land and community that would eventually eliminate their relationship to a “doomed” Indigeneity, their plan could never completely absorb the Native children they targeted for

¹⁴⁶ Indian Placement Committee Minutes, November 12, 1957, in Indian Student Placement Program Files, 1950-1998, CR 245 2, CHL.

rescue and alteration. First, several of the Church Committee's own actions undermined their seemingly color-blind, inclusive worldview. Despite President Kimball's prayerful observations that the "Lamanites" were gradually whitening to not only spiritually but indeed physically resemble their hosts, administrators and many host families took steps to mark Indigenous children as different. They discouraged interracial dating, and Clare Bishop held holiday festivals for the "Lamanites" to encourage them to date other Indians. This logic not only drew a hard line between Native and non-Native people, but also lumped diverse tribal affiliations into one race, flattening Native conceptions of difference in favor of a white/non-white binary.

Second, as the next chapter explores, students pushed back against framings that demanded they abandon their ties to Indigeneity to take up the mantle of "Lamanite." For some, like Aneta, the spiritual responsibilities thrust upon them by the church could be reconciled and work within their obligations to their natal families and cultures. Most oral history interviews examined here fall into this category. Yet, there is still evidence that a greater number of students found the expectations of church and Indigeneity irreconcilable. Still another group of students seems to have chosen another path—taking what they needed from the placement program, and leaving what they did not, regardless of the Indian Committee's efforts to control them. The next chapter, which focuses on student's creative use of the placement program, explores these ambiguities.

IV: WEATHERING PLACEMENT: REMOVAL, RESILIENCE, AND REGENERATION IN INDIAN COUNTRY

In the middle of March, 1953, Diné placement student Arkee Boone learned that his host, Eunice Coop, planned to pass him off to another LDS family.¹⁴⁷ Perhaps prompted by this revelation, Arkee's mother Belinda Boone reached out to her son. "I want you to be a good boy wherever you are," she told him, encouraging him to tell his new host family that "we sure thank them for you'r [sic] staying with them."¹⁴⁸ When Belinda's next letter arrived a month later in April, Arkee had moved in with a third host family—Mr. and Mrs. Young of Richfield, Utah.¹⁴⁹ Ms. Boone again encouraged her son to be a "good boy," but this time her tone seemed more urgent. Arkee has run away at least once, and Sister Coop—the boy's previous host—had written to Belinda to notify her. In response, Belinda suggested that Arkee should seek permission before going out to visit friends, and that he takes care to give the host family the right impression. "We[']ll see you again soon," she encouraged him, implying that Arkee might have left his hosts out of the loneliness that came with being so far away from his natal family and community.¹⁵⁰

The letter gave another reason for Arkee to run off, though. In a heartbreaking passage, Belinda mentioned that she and one of her younger sons grew seriously ill in October 1953. Belinda recovered, but the boy—Arkee's brother or perhaps brother-in-law—died. "The church helped with everything," Belinda told Arkee, "they bought the beautiful coffen [sic] for him they got him clothes and payed for the funeral, so that's why I

¹⁴⁷ Letter dated March 26, 1953, A.M., in "Belinda Boone Letters," MSS SC 1536, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library (HBL), Provo, Utah.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, page 2.

¹⁴⁹ Letter dated April 21, 1953, A.M., in "Belinda Boone Letters," HBL.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 1-2.

help with the church.” Concluding her short letter, Belinda urged her son to keep in mind what the church has done for them and to be thankful for the opportunity to finish out the school year in Richfield. Unfortunately, we may never know Arkee’s response. His letters have not entered the historical record, although his next were revealing. On the back of the envelope that contains the second letter, someone wrote “Letters left behind by Arkee Boone.”¹⁵¹

From her language, it’s clear that Belinda Boone was a Latter-day Saint, probably a recent convert. It’s unclear if her son shared her faith. From the letter, we can also tell that the death of the brother was not new information to Arkee. Instead, Ms. Boone’s reminder of how the church helped her serves as a confirmation of her conviction “to keep with the church.”¹⁵² It would be odd for her to make these statements, repeating old and painful information, if her son had not voiced criticism of the church, the program, or both in previous letters. At the very least, reports of his actions from Sister Coop and others must have made her feel as if this encouragement was necessary.

As a source, these letters leave a great deal of room for interpretation and are not without problems. To start, Belinda’s first language was likely Diné bizaad, and it’s unclear from the letters how fully she had mastered English.¹⁵³ The letters are written in an inconstant hand, suggesting that Belinda received help from one of the missionaries she referenced in her letter—that is—if she did not dictate the entire thing to a white proselyte. The evidence of a proof-reader or even an intermediary suggests that her message on the letter might differ from the message Ms. Boone intended. Even so, these letters are among

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 2; back of envelope.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁵³ Boone identified herself as Diné when she referred to Navajos as “my people.” Letter dated April 21, 1953, “Belinda Boone Letters,” 2. In the 1950s, the majority of Diné spoke mostly Diné bizaad.

the most valuable sources examined in this thesis. Ms. Boone is one of the few Indigenous parents of placement students in the historical record, a group whose perspectives are mostly absent in the documentary record and oral histories. The presence of these two letters in the archive alone is serendipitous twist of fate, owing first to Arkee leaving behind the correspondence and second to a host family or relative bringing them into the library rather than losing or destroying them.

But why did Arkee leave the letters behind? Perhaps it was just an oversight. Arkee may have chosen to move on after spending time with the Youngs, possibly in search of work opportunities, or to be nearer to friends—and left the letters behind as a result. During the early placement years, several young adult men found in placement an unusual degree of physical freedom, traveling from family to family doing odd jobs without having their status as placement students revoked.¹⁵⁴ In later years, as the program ossified and bureaucratized, such evidence of male Indigenous students' physical mobility entirely on their own terms became less and less common. But in 1953, it is entirely possible that Arkee could have been one of these rambling young men, free to move from job to job while studying in different schools, old enough to make his own journey back to the four sacred mountains if that was what he desired.

It is also conceivable that Arkee was moved to yet another home after the Youngs became dissatisfied, impoverished, or too busy to keep him in their home. As suggested by Ms. Boone's first letter, Arkee may also have run away again. Living in a new social and cultural environment, switching between at least three host homes during the year, and missing friends and loved ones could have been enough to convince Arkee to leave the

¹⁵⁴ For example, see James Lee Dandy, interviewed by Jessie L. Embry, MSS OH 1198, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL, 1990, 4-5.

Youngs. If Arkee had been away for placement for the entire school year, as the document implies, then he was away in Richfield when his brother and mother sickened. It is unlikely that he made it back home to Tuba City before his brother died. Just like so many American Indian students in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that found themselves in colonial educational institutions far from home, Arkee might have missed some of the most important events of life in the community he grew up in, including the death of his brother.¹⁵⁵ Fed up with the isolation of placement, Arkee could have bought a bus ticket directly home, leaving the letters behind because the placement charters to and from the Navajo Nation typically had little space for personal belongings.¹⁵⁶

In any case, Arkee left his mother's painstakingly written letters behind, and in doing so, left behind an excellent lesson of placement's constraints to historians. Arkee found himself in an environment that was not entirely of his own choosing, clearly experienced a great deal of loneliness and pain, and lacked officially sanctioned or parentally approved way of getting out of the situation. Yet, the letters also provide another important lesson—if Arkee was like other placement students, he likely reacted to this situation in creative ways that placement's architects could never have anticipated. The potential reasons why Arkee may have left—or the options he could have pursued afterward—demonstrate this chapter's central point. Placement's structure was repressive, designed as it was to distance Native children from their relationship with Indigenous systems of thought and community, but the students were not powerless amidst the program's constraints.

¹⁵⁵ Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

¹⁵⁶ Social Services Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Indian Student Guide," July 1971, p. 7, in Lamanite Assistant Manuals, M243.621 L214 197?, CHL.

It is common to hear both placement officials and their historians to remark that placement represented a better alternative to far-away, underfunded reservation day schools and the widely hated boarding schools. Placement students' exposure to LDS notions of faith and family often lie at the center of this reasoning. If the boarding school represented a cold and institutionalized way of assimilating Native children, then placement was a kinder, gentler means of accomplishing the same task. By living in patriarchal, middle-class family units, the students' feelings of severance would be more than made up for by their conversion to a means of living that white Mormons considered superior. Child removers took comfort in their belief that the short-term pain of separation and cultural devastation would yield everlasting benefits. Besides, church officials reasoned, knowledge of Indigenous people's "true" historical origins and "royal blood" would prove freeing to participants, not debilitating. As the Indian Student Guide explained, "the superstructure of the adopted religion may provide cultural substitutes that allay possible guilt feelings or anxieties which normally arise when human beings make cultural shifts."¹⁵⁷ The survey's authors did not hold the program responsible for the students' "guilt feelings or anxiety" that removal from their communities created in the first place. Any Indigenous culture lost in the placement experiment could be replaced by Mormon beliefs, and besides, the "cultural shift" was well-worth the sacrifice.

Other key placement figures saw Indigenous cultures as fundamentally at odds with Native peoples' ability to adhere to LDS scripture. In a 1966 memo responding to a call by the church's First Presidency to aid in the task of "gathering, civilizing, and converting the American Indian to the Gospel of Jesus Christ," LDS scholars at BYU's American Indian

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 40-41.

Studies and Research Center discussed the extent to which Native people could hold on to their Indigenous customs and still be Latter-day Saints. In his proposal for a general “policy” on assimilation in church programs, Coordinator of Research James R. Clark echoed Director Paul E. Felt, who quoted a 1961 archaeology talk by the President of BYU, Ernest C. Crockett. “Let us be very objective and honest,” the three men wrote, “that much of their [Native] culture, which many want to retain and perpetuate, should be de-emphasized because of its spiritually undermining influence.”¹⁵⁸ When addressing a public audience, church officials hardly ever spoke so candidly about their aims, but this private memo shows a rare glimpse of a moment when assimilation was the explicit, intended goal of church “Lamanite” programs, rather than an unintended consequence. Felt would go on to become the President of the Southwest Indian Mission in 1971, where he oversaw the removal and placement of Navajo children by Mormon missionaries.

Reflecting on placement with the benefit of hindsight, the program’s former officials sometimes commented on the ISPP’s more pernicious aspects of cultural distancing and the painful separation of Native families. Still, they clung to the notion that the program gave students better “opportunities” than the other colonial education strategies available to Native students at the time.¹⁵⁹ This framework has been adopted in a more complex form by historians, who observe that placement might have seemed the least terrible option of a series of difficult choices that Navajo parents and children might select. Similarly, historians

¹⁵⁸ James R. Clark, “Memo to Accompany the Statements of the First Presidency of the L.D.S. Church,” February 22, 1966, in Institute of American Indian Studies Records, UA 552, Box 22, Folder 10, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

¹⁵⁹ See Clarence R. Bishop, interviewed by Lynette Riggs, in Riggs, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ Indian Student Placement Service: A History,” PhD diss., Utah State University, 2008, 173. Bishop argues “if we were wrong to do this, then we shouldn’t be baptizing Hindus or Christians, either. . . and it [placement] was a success. We offered opportunity. Just the offering was successful. It was up to them to succeed or fail.”

have also argued that Indigenous people made rational choices in sending their children out for placement, since the program represented their best hope of having meaningful sway over their children's educational lives. In this vein, Megan Stanton argues that placement allowed for "Native direction," where Indigenous parents and students could exercise more control over the program than other available options, like boarding schools.¹⁶⁰

Yet these perspectives simultaneously downplay placement's coercive aspects while also minimizing the degree to which agency within the program was seized by Native people, not freely bestowed by its architects. Structurally, placement might easily have been an even more repressive, traumatizing, and destructive institution than the contested reality that emerged. As I have explored in the previous two chapters, the ISPP shared many of the confines of the boarding school system, while intimate surveillance in nuclear family units created uniquely disempowering conditions for Indigenous youth. Placement might still have seemed the least unsatisfactory option to some, but it was hardly ideal for the majority of participants (who showed their dissatisfaction by leaving, like Arkee). Indeed, some of the biggest "opportunities" created by placement were never authorized by its creators, but instead consisted of unseen paths traveled by Indigenous children, adolescents, and their families. In this chapter, I argue that Indigenous students and their communities created their own, unplanned avenues to minimize placement's harm while maximizing the program's benefits. The most helpful aspects of placement were not gifts given by the benevolent nature of the program's structure, but the result of hard-fought struggles of Indigenous students and their families.

¹⁶⁰ Megan Stanton, "The Indian Student Placement Program and Native Direction," in *Essays on American Indian and Mormon History*, eds. P. Jane Hafen and Brenden W. Rensink (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019).

This chapter will explore individual participants' unauthorized uses of the program. First, this chapter shows how impoverished Diné and other Indigenous families used the program to ensure that their children would get enough to eat in times of scarcity. The chapter also explores the possibility that Native children participated in the program as a means of securing health care, especially during the early stages of the program, when the church took care of most needed medical expenses. The Big Sister's Club, started by young Navajo women out on placement, gave lonely students a space to interact with other Diné youngsters and tutor the next generation of students. Finally, as other historians have noted, some students did find a permanent sense of belonging and community in the LDS social and spiritual world, though the degree to which they harmoniously joined a larger LDS community seems exaggerated by the available documents. The archive contains only whispers of the worst of the program's brutal excesses, like sexual violence.

The chapter also explores Native resistance to child removal programs generally and the placement program specifically. The Indian Child Welfare hearings of 1977 and the subsequent Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 brought together Indigenous activists and their allies to refute the most unjust aspects of Indigenous child removal programs of the 1970s. Even though a last-minute deal between the church and ICWA supporters allowed placement to continue, a disputed custody case in 1986 gave Navajo courts full authority over fostered and adopted Diné children. The chapter ends by considering how the LDS Placement Program can be seen as an uneven and shifting negotiation over Indigenous peoples' identities, rights, and roles in a larger settler society that has sought to colonize them.

Placement and other forms of removal-based education needed a context of Indigenous material and economic deprivation in order to secure widespread, mostly voluntary participation among young Indigenous people. During the 20th century, much of Indian Country remained economically devastated as a result of colonialism, displacement, social marginalization, and political disenfranchisement. As the majority of placement participants, Diné faced particularly disastrous economic situations due to the federal government's reduction of Navajo sheep, goat, and horse herds in the 1930s, which reduced a formerly self-sufficient people to government dependency. The Collier administration's well-intended reduction efforts likely intensified the slow destruction of much of the Navajo homeland's range, impoverishing Diné Bikéyah's ecological resources for years to come. The disastrous policy also weakened Diné faith in Collier's BIA, leading Navajo voters to reject a Navajo national constitution, which would have empowered the tribal government to create a sufficient number of day schools and institute other much-needed "Indian New Deal" policies.¹⁶¹ When drought and a series of consecutive tough winters struck the Navajo Nation in 1947, ecological factors coalesced with the historical legacies of colonialism to bring many Navajo families dangerously close to the brink of famine. The US government authorized financial assistance, conducted subsistence air drops, and considered plans to again relocate Navajo people away from their homelands—especially to the urban environments of Salt Lake City, Denver, and Los Angeles.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983); Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*: (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); David E. Wilkins, *The Navajo Political Experience*, 4th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 2013.

¹⁶² Donald L. Fixico, *Indian Resilience and Rebuilding: Indigenous Nations in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 98.

The twentieth century was also a time of economic woe and policy-induced suffering for many other Indigenous peoples in North America. Just like the Navajos during their removal to Hwéeldi, many Indigenous people that participated in placement had suffered as settlers whittled down the size of their homelands over the centuries—that is, if they had not been removed to a different location entirely. But not all placement students came from reservations and other Native-majority communities. Clarence Bishop (perhaps exaggerating) once remarked that “one half of our students in the Program are not on reservations. They are in the slum areas of San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Chicago.”¹⁶³ In the cities, Native people faced far higher rates of poverty than other Americans, and popular media made this fact known throughout the 1960s in highly racialized depictions of alcoholism and misery. The “hard journalism” of the Cold War era frequently presented the poverty in American Indian communities as a moral problem, not a material one, and the LDS Church’s most widely distributed film strip in Indian country, “Bitter Wind,” played to these dominant assumptions. “Bitter Wind” portrays the central reason for Native communities’ misery in the mid-twentieth century as a problem created by alcoholism, which fails to account for the conditions created by colonialism that made the disease widespread in the first place. The conflation between the disease of alcoholism and widespread poverty was an especially useful one for the Church, since the LDS Word of Wisdom prohibits the consumption of alcohol. As President Spencer W. Kimball remarked in 1965, conversion meant “no more liquor for these people—that money will go to fixing up the home instead.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, the

¹⁶³ Indian Student Placement Committee Minutes (ISPC Minutes), October 5, 1968, in Indian Student Placement Program Files, 1950-1998, CR 245 2, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints History Library (CHL), Salt Lake City, 4.

¹⁶⁴ Spencer W. Kimball, “A Changing World for the Barry Begays,” address delivered 2 October 1965, in Lamanite Assistant Manuals, CHL, M243.621 L214 197-?.

church also sought to remove children from Native families in cities, where they again read perceived poverty and alcoholism onto Native families as a justification for removal. Partly based off these tropes of Indigenous immorality and insobriety, Indians in several Southwestern states could not vote until the 1960s. In the state of Utah, for example, the capital and center of the LDS Church during placement's half-century of existence, Indians were not guaranteed voting rights until 1962.

After a drought and three harsh winters in the late 1940s, when Helen John and her family were hired as seasonal workers by the Utah-Idaho Beet Company, many Diné people were starving, but had limited political influence to improve their situation. Lilly Neil, the first woman elected to the Navajo Tribal Council, joined other activists in pointing out the hypocrisy of a federal government that focused its postwar aid on former enemies, rather than providing material assistance to Navajo allies who had played a significant role in World War II (both on the battlefield and in the factories).¹⁶⁵ Like many liberal Americans in the Cold War era, white Latter-day Saints did not reply to these urgent pleas with material aid. Instead, they started removing children. This made it necessary for families that sent their children on placement to devise their own solutions.

Termination, championed by Mormon senator Arthur Watkins, also played a significant role in undermining Indigenous sovereignty and material well-being. During the 1950s, Watkins led the effort to end federal control over and assistance to 109 previously recognized tribes.¹⁶⁶ Termination threatened to remove any claim that the targeted tribe had over its land base, dissolving the basis for tribal autonomy and self-sufficiency, even as

¹⁶⁵ Paul C. Rosier, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 123.

¹⁶⁶ Margaret D. Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

Congress argued that its laws would transform Indians from unfree wards of the state into independent political actors who enjoyed the privileges of full citizenship.¹⁶⁷ As historian Charles Wilkinson observed, terminated Indians instead “found themselves poorer, bereft of healthcare, and suffering a painful loss of community, homeland, and self-identity.”¹⁶⁸

Due to the terrible economic conditions they faced at home, some Indigenous people chose to go or send their children on placement as an alternative to starvation. Diné student Maybell Begaye recalls many evenings where her family took turns eating from a jar of peanut butter or a box of raisins.¹⁶⁹ Growing up in the city, Edouardo Zendejas recalled going to bed hungry some nights.¹⁷⁰ In 1957, LDS onlookers reported that there were visible differences between first-year placement students—who were “usually thin, mal-nutritioned and backward”—and the returning students, who “have better looking teeth, have gained on an average of 12 pounds and grown an average of one inch, and are emotionally able to open up and communicate with others.”¹⁷¹ One should be skeptical of such “significant differences” after time in placement, given the Saints’ expectations of how the “backward” Lamanites would “blossom.” Indeed, many members of the church’s “Indian Committee” genuinely believed that time in the program could physically whiten placement participants’ skin. Still, their observations of malnutrition among many placement participants seem accurate.

¹⁶⁷ Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*, 91-110.

¹⁶⁸ Charles Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 81.

¹⁶⁹ Dale L. Shumway and Margene Shumway, *The Blossoming: Dramatic Accounts of the Lives of Native Americans in the Foster Care Program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Orem: Granite, 2002), 166.

¹⁷⁰ Edouardo Zondajas [sic], interviewed by Malcom T. Pappan, 1990, LDS Native American Oral History Project, MSS OH 1144, HBL. The name should be Edouardo Zendejas, not “Zondajas.”

¹⁷¹ Indian Placement Committee Minutes, 12 November 1957, p. 3.

The degree to which the decision to send starving children on placement can be labeled a ‘free’ choice depends entirely on how we define consent. In any case, Native parents used placement to secure alimony for their children in hard times, making creative use of placement in ways that the program’s architects had never intended. “This program is not a welfare program,” director Clarence Bishop declared in 1963, “it is a leadership program designed to motivate individuals” to promote the church’s social, cultural, and spiritual objectives in the communities that the students had come from.¹⁷² According to Golden Buchanan, the leaders that placement created would grow up to “completely dominate the affairs of the Indian people from a religious and economic point of view. Our Elders then would have no difficulty entering homes on the reservation and our proselytizing would go forward on an intensified scale.”¹⁷³ Despite the spotlight that the church and other progenitors of late-twentieth century child removal shined on Indigenous poverty, programs like placement were more concerned with converting Indians to the perceived morality of market capitalism and Christian living than they were about meeting a dire material need.

Placement’s architects echoed widespread liberal beliefs during the Cold War that modern consumer amenities might convince placement students to abandon their natal ways for the supposed comforts of non-Indigenous life. Indeed, host parents’ stories during the early days of placement reported that the Indigenous students were obsessed with kitchen appliances and mechanized agricultural equipment. One mother even claimed that her

¹⁷² Clarence Bishop, 1963, quoted in Matthew Garrett, *Making Lamanites: Mormons, Native Americans, and the Indian Student Placement Program, 1947-2000* (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press: 2016), 128.

¹⁷³ Golden Buchanan, “The Outing Program as it has developed,” Indian Committee Correspondence, 1941-1952, Box 7, Folder 38, CR 37 1, CHL.

Indian “foster daughter” could not stop doing dishes after she saw how efficient the family’s dishwasher was.¹⁷⁴ These types of stories illustrate much more about Cold War Americans’ belief in their superiority of their way of life than they do about Indigenous people. Just as Americans believed that Whirlpool’s fully automated “miracle” kitchen would cripple the USSR by fostering a desire for kitchen appliances among Soviet housewives, white Saints believed that Indians could be converted into Lamanites by industrialized consumer goods.¹⁷⁵ To the extent that starvation might be leveraged to secure Native students’ participation in placement, stories of reservation poverty served as a useful backdrop to placement. But poverty alleviation was not the chief motivation behind the project of child removal. After all, if the improvement of American Indians’ material lives was the chief goal, a whole regimen of cheaper and more effective means could have been employed. Instead of working to promote termination and placement, the church and affiliated politicians could have lobbied the government to build accessible day schools and improve transportation to those facilities. This system would have had the advantage of keeping Indigenous families together. Furthermore, the state of Utah might have enfranchised Native people so that they could play a larger role in shaping policies that affected their communities. Finally, and most critically, the church could have provided direct material aid. Yet the logic of child removal was impervious to Indigenous leaders’ calls for direct interventions; instead, the church opted for a more intrusive, transformative solution. As Spencer W. Kimball summarized, by converting students to the proper identity of freedom, capitalism, spirituality, and

¹⁷⁴ Andrew Hamilton, “Their Indian Guests,” *Saturday Evening Post*, September 17, 1960, 85.

¹⁷⁵ For the rivalry over the Whirlpool kitchen, see Susan E. Reid, “Who Will Beat Whom: The American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959,” *Kritika* 9 no. 4 (2008): 855-904.

whiteness—in essence, the white Mormon conception of ‘modernity’—placement would perform in a single generation what centuries of failed Indian policy could not.¹⁷⁶

The widespread poverty across much of Indian country in the late twentieth century might have created the need for other creative re-imaginings of placement’s uses by Native people. Although further research would be needed to confirm this assertion, there is evidence to suggest that Indigenous families who lacked ready access to medical care might have used placement as a means of expanding their children’s access to healthcare. As placement’s 1966 guide for the “Natural Parents” of Native students explains, “the foster parents” would help to pay for the student’s “minor” medical needs, including optical health, dental work, and medical care.¹⁷⁷ In the event of more serious injury, such as broken bones or serious burns, the church helped to foot the bill.¹⁷⁸ In the late 1950s and perhaps early 1960s, children over the age of 13 might also receive intensive care through the state of Utah’s Crippled Children’s Service.¹⁷⁹ In 1966, the incidence of hospitalizations of Indian placement students was considerable enough that an LDS bishop could gain expedited processing in hospitals by scrawling “Indian Student” across the top of the admission recommend.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ A similar report estimated that the children of placement alumni would have an advantage” of nearly three centuries of cultural change” over their grandparents. See Brigham Young University, “A Supplement to the Report on the American Indian Program,” 1972, M243.621 B8545s 1972, CHL, 37.

¹⁷⁷ The L.D.S. Student Placement Program, “Natural Parent Guide,” 1966, M243.621 P228 1966, CHL, 4. A later edition of the Natural Parent Guide, from 1970, copies the 1966 version’s wording on medical aid verbatim. See the Lamanite Assistant Manuals, Call no: M243.621 L214 197-?, available from online catalogue but restricted, CHL, for the 1970 version of the Natural Parent Guide.

¹⁷⁸ Unified Social Services of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Foster Parent Guide,” 1970, 17, in Lamanite Assistant Manuals, CHL.

¹⁷⁹ Indian Student Placement Committee Minutes (ISPC Minutes), January 7, 1958, CHL, 3.

¹⁸⁰ The Priesthood Bulletin, “Medical and Dental Care for Indian Placement Students,” Volume 2 no. 2, Mar.-Apr. 1966, in Lamanite Assistant Manuals, CHL.

Placement students received extensive care in the program's early days, with host families and the church taking on most of the costs. In 1957 placement's consulting physician Robert F. Hansen suggested that 136 of the 289 program recruits needed immediate dental care and would be sent to dentists at the church's Intermountain Indian School for treatment to keep costs down.¹⁸¹ Hansen reported that many children also needed glasses, two children had chronic ear infections that required hospitalization, eight boys needed surgical evaluation for a "genital gland condition" (perhaps Dr. Hansen believed they should be circumcised?), and a handful suffered from spinal abnormalities and broken bones.¹⁸² Finally, the doctor suggested that a young boy receive surgical work on a birth mark for "psychiatric reasons in the future."¹⁸³

Despite Dr. Hansen's dubious ethical choices (like 'frog testing' young women students and allowing placement students' blood samples to be tested without consent), he seems to have espoused a view of placement that focused on providing medical care for Indigenous children who needed it but could not get adequate care in their home communities. Like Director of American Indian Studies Paul E. Felt, who believed that Indian cultures could be "de-emphasized" in favor of white, Latter-day Saint practices, Hansen's vision foresaw a day when Navajo ceremonies incorporated "medicine with them."¹⁸⁴ Like most who worked with the program, Hansen's assumptions about Indigenous people were riddled with ethnocentric bias—but he still saw a future where one of the program's main pillars included increasing medicinal options for the Diné and other placement constituencies. For reasons that cannot be discerned from my limited access to

¹⁸¹ ISPC Minutes, November 12, 1957, 1.

¹⁸² Ibid, 2.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 4.

the Indian Committee Minutes, Hansen fell from the program's inner circle. Dr. Carlos N. Madsen took over as placement's chief physician consultant in 1958, and the program's relationship to medicine changed.

Before the Indian Committee in 1958, Dr. Madsen argued that LDS social workers spent so much time attending to Navajo children's medical needs that they failed to properly ensure the students' cultural assimilation—the program's critical “social aspect.”¹⁸⁵ Madsen wanted to transfer as much of the economic and administrative burden as possible onto the Indigenous communities that the children came from. Making sure that “every Indian child leaves the reservation in good physical condition” would require coordination between tribal and church entities, but Madsen believed it a feasible solution to the problem of social workers being spread too thin to meet the placement cohorts' many medical needs, which seemed to increase each year. It does seem that the church was able to get the Navajo Tribal Council to foot the bill for some medical expenses, but students continued to arrive with significant health issues. After Madsen, though, the church did all it could to push medical bills onto host families, Indigenous families and communities, or the state. Meanwhile, in Canada, the national government's healthcare system helped to provide for placement student's medical needs.¹⁸⁶

In 1958, Navajo Tribal Chairman Paul Jones complained to the church Indian Committee about a Diné youngster who had suffered severe burns in Richfield. The stake's president, supposedly acting out of “pure humanitarian feelings,” sent the youth to the Children's Primary Hospital and later the LDS Hospital for treatment. These hospitals then sent the \$2,000 bill to the Navajo Tribal Council over Jones' objections. But the church's

¹⁸⁵ ISPC Minutes, December 2, 1958, 2.

¹⁸⁶ See Lamanite Assistant Manuals, CHL.

Indian Committee maintained they were in the right. According to the Saints, the child had been with his Diné parents when the accident occurred—and besides, they alleged, the chairman was under the mistaken impression that the youngster was a member of the church’s Indian Student Placement Program. Regardless of whether Jones thought the patient a placement student or not, he was familiar enough with stories of Indian youngsters receiving medical care from the Mormons that it seemed right that the church should cover this bill, as well. Perhaps members of his constituency who participated in the program had similar assumptions. The disagreement also reveals the extent to which 1958 was a turning point for the role of medicine in the placement program.¹⁸⁷ At this time, Navajo health officials also sought to increasingly exert influence over the treatment and health products that those on placement used. In November of 1958, Larry Moore of the Navajo Department of Community Services wrote to the church-run boarding school Intermountain to advise them against using Zenith hearing aids, as some client had complained of trouble with that product.¹⁸⁸

As with promises to reduce American Indian poverty, Placement officials used the lack of healthcare available to many Indigenous families to market their program to would-be participants, even as they sought to limit the church’s role in covering medical expenses. The 1982 propaganda pamphlet “The Indian People Have Much to Be Proud Of” declares that children on placement will have their health needs taken care of, including “Eye examination[s], Dental work, Immunizations, Prescriptions.”¹⁸⁹ Meanwhile the “Lamanite

¹⁸⁷ ISPC Minutes, September 9, 1958, 4.

¹⁸⁸ Letter from Larry Moore to Morris S. Fleischman, M.D., November 1958, in ISPC Minutes, 1958, CHL.

¹⁸⁹ LDS Social Services, “The Indian People Have Much to Be Proud Of,” 1982, Americana Collection, BX 8608 .A1a no.3995, HLBB, 16.

Student Guide” advised placement students to be careful about what they tell friends and family when they returned home, lest they give others an incorrect perception of the LDS program. According to the guide, there are some students who “brag about all the things their foster family gave them or did for them,” which “causes some new students to apply for the program *only* because they also want to receive all of the things they have heard about.”¹⁹⁰ The guide seems concerned that hearing stories of material wealth in Utah might cause students to go on placement for the “wrong” reasons, but Indigenous people probably also noticed improved health outcomes for their neighbors and family members returning from placement. Even though tales of Indigenous people coming home with fancy new clothes and making their friends jealous proved popular in the stories Cold War Saints told about their placement guests, it seems just as likely that prospective students took equal notice of participants’ new glasses, repaired teeth, and reset bones.

Placement participants’ actions to expand placement’s benefits and minimize its harms also resulted in the formation of clubs and student groups. The so-called “big sister tutoring program” that Diné placement students at Woods Cross High School formed represents an excellent example. The program’s young women members not only helped to tutor elementary school age Navajo placement students, but also made the youngsters Diné dishes like fry bread and spoke to them in Diné bizaad. The “big sisters” did more than provide tutoring assistance, but also helped to create a social microcosm that reminded elder and younger members of the community that they came from.¹⁹¹ As the previous chapter explored, placement’s architects intended to separate Indigenous students as much as possible from other students who might share linguistic and communal ties with them.

¹⁹⁰ “Lamanite Student Guide,” in Lamanite Assistant Manuals, 8.

¹⁹¹ Roselyn Kirk, “Indian Tutoring Program,” *Davis County Clipper*, February 11, 1977.

Placement officials figured this would help them to assimilate more quickly and to learn better English. Yet placement students in the program's waning decades located one another and formed groups to overcome feelings of isolation, homesickness, and separation from the cultures of their home communities.



Fig. 3. Vicky Benally, left, helps Lyle Yazzie with a math problem. Meanwhile, Marie Washburn, right, works with Freddie Yazzie. From Kirk, "Indian Tutoring Program," *Davis County Clipper*, 11 February 1977.

These clubs stood in defiance of the centrally liminal status that had defined Indigenous children's place in LDS society for much of placement. They had been allowed to go to school with a majority of white students in public schools, and yet could not participate in one of the LDS community's most central social rituals with white people—courtship and marriage. Placement students also frequently found themselves moving from home to home, rather than staying in the same community for the duration of their placement, like Arkee. Even after a placement student managed to set down roots in a new

place, finally making friends and contacts in the new community, they might be transplanted elsewhere once again, having to start the entire process anew.

Placement students also struggled with the expectations that they use kinship terms to describe their so-called “foster parents.” In an oral history interview, former ISPP participant Tonia Halona reported that she “wasn’t ready” at first to call the “strangers” who were her host parents “mom” and “dad.” But eventually, using kinship terms with the foster family became “natural” to Halona.¹⁹² Lucinda McDonald, Navajo, also told an interviewer that she felt uncomfortable about referring to her host family using kinship terms. As a high schooler who had returned to placement, she felt uncomfortable calling the LDS adults mom and dad, because it felt as if she was replacing her own parents after both had passed away. “I just call them [the placement host parents] by their names. I just feel much better that way than calling them mom and dad.”¹⁹³ Carletta Yellowjohn’s host family also requested that she call them mom and dad, and she too found that “I couldn’t bring myself to do that.” She was sent on placement after her father died and favored calling her hosts “Mr. and Mrs. Foster because their last name was Foster.”¹⁹⁴ In this context, the efforts of Diné students to form clubs like the big sister’s program becomes especially meaningful, in that it allowed students to recreate familiar kinship networks on their own terms.

In line with the objectives of placement’s architects, however, some Indigenous students did find a permanent sense of belonging and community in the LDS social world, both Native and non-Native, though the degree to which this occurred seems significantly

¹⁹² Tonia Halona, interviewed by Jim M. Dandy, MSS OH 1146, 10 April 1991, LDS Native American Oral History Program, HBLL, 3.

¹⁹³ Lucinda McDonald, interviewed by Jim M. Dandy, MSS OH 1200, 19 March 1991, LDS Native American Oral History Program, HBLL, 4-5. Quote from page 5.

¹⁹⁴ Carletta O. Yellowjohn, interviewed by Odessa Neaman, MSS OH 1233, 10 July 1990, LDS Native American Oral History Project, HBLL, 4.

overestimated by the available documents. One of the tragedies of this story is that we may never hear the worst of the program's brutal excesses, like sexual violence. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the oral histories are useful sources of information, but selectively capture the views of those who remained in the church—a group typically more satisfied with their placement experience than the average student. Yet even those who had spectacular achievements under the program suffered from considerable setbacks. The most famous alumni of the Indian Placement Program, George P. Lee, was publicly excommunicated in 1989 after an illustrious career in the church. Lee was a poster boy for the program, coming from an impoverished Diné family who had hidden their children from BIA officials in the 1930s but reluctantly allowed Lee to go on placement as a boy. A graduate of Brigham Young University, Lee became the first (and, so far, only) Native American member of the First Quorum of Seventy, an elite LDS chamber that aids the First Presidency in governing the church. However, Lee suffered a horrific fall from grace after he questioned the decision of church leadership to allow its “Lamanite” programs to decay in the late 1980s. After the death of Spencer W. Kimball in 1985, the church ended its Indian programs at BYU, slowed its missionary activities in the Southwest, and recruited fewer students for the ISPP each year. Just like the era of Indigenous indenture and servitude in colonial Mormon homes, the “second cycle of Lamanite redemption” slowed to a halt with disappointment as few of the “Lamanites” remained active in the church.¹⁹⁵ In the mid-eighties, the church began to look elsewhere for “Lamanites,” and increased its proselytizing among Indigenous peoples in South America and the Pacific. The projection of “Lamanites”

¹⁹⁵ Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 369.

elsewhere betrayed how completely Mormons felt the project had failed in the Southwest, especially among Diné.

Then, in 1989, Apostle Lee was excommunicated for voicing criticism of the Ezra Taft Benson First Presidency and its termination of support for placement and other “Lamanite” programs. The fall of Lee was both representative of and pushed along the quiet, unmemorable death of the ISPP as it went from a dominant program to a history forgotten by many white Latter-day Saints. His excommunication was considered big news at the time—all the oral history interviews in the 1990s with placement students asked the alumni of their opinions on George P. Lee, and how this might affect their convictions in the church, but ultimately, the program was already in an irreparable state of decline before 1989.

Historians have observed that placement’s decline after 1973 stemmed from wide spiritual disillusionment with the program from rank-and-file church members and leaders, concerns over the program’s expenses, the weakening and death of chief Indian proselytizer President Spencer W. Kimball, the increasing number and accessibility of reservation day schools, and growing missionary successes among the newly considered “Lamanites” in Indigenous-majority communities of South and Central America, as well as the Pacific.¹⁹⁶ However, Margaret Jacobs has also made the valuable observation that placement and other child removal programs ended because of collective Indigenous activism in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Activists confronted the Indigenous child welfare crisis by refuting Cold War-era, liberal, and colorblind assertions that the proponents of Indigenous

¹⁹⁶ See Garrett, *Making Lamanites*, 2016. See also James B. Allen, “The Rise and Decline of the LDS Indian Student Placement Program, 1947-1996,” in Davis Bitton, ed., *Mormon Scriptures and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson* (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Mormon Research, 1998), 85-119.

child removal championed. The drafting and defense of the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act, or ICWA, brought together Indigenous people and allied law firms in defense of Indigenous families, cultures, and homelands by granting tribal governments exclusive jurisdiction over reservation children. The activism of Indigenous people and their allies helped to bring new, critical perspectives on the program in popular culture, such as those by journalists like Beth Wood, Robert Gottlieb, and Peter Wiley.¹⁹⁷ Their articles and book undermined public perceptions of the program that the church had carefully curated since its experiment began, contributing to mounting criticism of the ISPP in the late 1970s.

However, the church was able to use its lobbying power to successfully secure an exception for its placement program, so that it continued to bring Indigenous children into Mormon homes even after the passage of ICWA. At the 1977 Senate hearing, George P. Lee and commissioner of LDS Social Services Harold Brown argued that ICWA would interfere with the free choice of placement students and their families. They presented similar critiques to other child removal organizations, which concerned themselves with colorblind arguments over the loss of rights that ICWA would spell for individual Indian people. Meanwhile, Bobby George, a spokesman for the Navajo Nation, confirmed that Diné were grateful for the “education, social services, health care and community development” that religious organizations provided when the “state and local government failed to provide these necessities.” However, he also encouraged religious groups “to expend their time, effort, and money in improving the lives of Indian families within Indian nations rather than

¹⁹⁷ Beth Wood, “LDS Indian Placement Program: To Whose Advantage?,” *Akwesasne Notes*, Winter 1978, M243.621 W873 1978, CHL, 16-17; Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, “The Kids Go Out Navaho, Come Back Donny and Marie: the Mormons’ Controversial Save-Our-Indians Program,” *Los Angeles Magazine*, December 1979, 138-146; Gottlieb and Wiley, *America’s Saints: The Rise of Mormon Power* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1985).

removing the children to strange lands with strange people.” The Navajos did not come out against placement—instead, they wanted the LDS Church to recognize the nation’s sovereign authority over Diné children. Because the lobbying power of the LDS Church was so great, the senate’s greatest proponent of ICWA, Senator James Abourezk of South Dakota, had to cut a separate deal with the Saints to ensure the bill’s passage, allowing placement to stagger on legally for two more decades. However, a 1986 ruling by the Utah Supreme Court over the disputed adoption of Diné youngster Jermiah Halloway did grant the Navajo courts sole jurisdiction over the fostering and adopting of youth within the Nation’s boundaries.¹⁹⁸

Undoubtedly, growing LDS disillusionment with placement helps to account for the program’s quiet undoing in the final decades of the 20th century, but Indigenous activism through ICWA and the Halloway case also played a key role in ending Mormon child removal practices. This shows that Indigenous people not only took individual action to minimize the harms of placement while maximizing its helpful aspects, but that they also worked collectively to set the conditions under which child removal programs like placement could legally function. More research would be needed to establish a clear causal connection, but it is interesting to note that placement’s decline coincided with increasing Indigenous autonomy within and over the Indian Student Placement Program.

A clear, key lesson is this: with the benefit of hindsight, we can think of better ways that the LDS church might have improved educational “opportunities” for Navajo and other Indigenous youth that would not have required removing them from their families and

¹⁹⁸ Jacobs, *A Generation Removed*, 127-161. Bobby George quotes from US Senate, *ICWA Congressional Hearing, 1977*, 172-73. For the Halloway case, see Jacobs, “Entangled Histories: The Mormon Church and Indigenous Child Removal from 1850 to 2000,” *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 2 (2016): 27-60.

cultures. They might have focused on building day schools and helping to finance efforts to improve connection and transportation across Indian country. They could have lobbied the federal government in favor of growing Indigenous autonomy. These tactics have been more successful at creating strong, lasting educational institutions that prioritized Indigenous value systems.

Still, none of these measures could have been perfect solutions, as they too would be steeped in the white racial frame, Cold War anxieties, and a settler colonial logic. Still, that the church chose placement helps to demonstrate that education was not the only or even primary purpose of its various “Lamanite Programs.” Church officials and placement families wanted to elevate Indigenous peoples in a broader sense, according to their own culture, gender, and class values. Placement was not just about teaching Indigenous students technical skills, but it also contained a whole hidden curriculum that sought to modify the students’ identities. This hidden curriculum is best represented by placement’s overriding imperative to get the so-called “Lamanites” to understand their “true history.”

At its core, placement set forth an argument about the best way to understand the past. In its best moments, the program sought to foster harmony between the church’s version of American history and the stories that Indigenous people told about themselves—and here, at times, it could succeed in bringing up students who could reconcile and even live harmoniously within seemingly disparate belief systems. At its worst, the program sought to convince Indigenous people to abandon their self-conceived origins entirely, and here the project almost always ended in failure. That students made it through the colonial confines of placement’s architecture successfully—that they sometimes made real gains to their social, material, or education circumstances—is not a reflection of the program’s benevolence, but of their resolve and ingenuity in confronting a new colonial scheme. They

made the most of the limited opportunities provided them, while building whole new avenues for creative and collective growth that placement officials could never have intended or even imagined. Just like the Indigenous people taken captive by Mormons a century before, placement students navigated, accommodated, and resisted their unenviable circumstances to create the best existence possible. The distinction, besides the enormous difference in degrees of coercion between captivity and placement, lay in the collective capacity of Indigenous nations and communities in the latter era to thwart the colonial scheme.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: COLUMBUS AMONG THE GENTILES

In January of 2020, the LDS Church’s primary publication for teaching young members about scripture, *Come, Follow Me*, officially sanctioned the view that the Book of Mormon prophesies the transatlantic voyages of Christopher Columbus. In this reading of the Book of Mormon, Columbus brings the “wrath of God” down upon the Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, who “were smitten” and “scattered” by later “Gentile” settlers.¹⁹⁹ This interpretation referred to an early passage of the Book of Mormon, where the Prophet Nephi (founder of the Nephites) looks out from American soil across the Atlantic:

And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren [Lamanites] by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.²⁰⁰

In affirming the idea that Columbus was the “man among the Gentiles,” the church’s youth curriculum advanced the idea that the Genoan colonizer and enslaver was divinely inspired. It follows from the church’s interpretation that the genocide that Columbus began against the “Lamanites” in America would continue to receive God’s blessing as the “exceedingly fair and beautiful” Gentiles colonized the continent to “obtain the land for their inheritance.”²⁰¹ Thus, even as the church has distanced itself from claims that Native people are “Lamanites,” LDS teachings continue to promote settler colonial readings of the

¹⁹⁹ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families Book of Mormon 2020*, January 20-26, 1 Nephi 11-15: “Armed with Righteousness and the Power of God,” available from: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/come-follow-me-for-individuals-and-families-book-of-mormon-2020/04?lang=eng>; 1 Ne. 13:11, 13:14.

²⁰⁰ 1 Ne. 13:12.

²⁰¹ 2 Ne. 13:15.

Book of Mormon. The Americas are a promised land, justly taken from cursed Indigenous inhabitants for the settlers to claim as their inheritance. Furthermore, seeing the “man among the Gentiles” as Columbus makes genocide and dispossession against Native people a prerequisite for the eventual “restoration” of the LDS gospel—after all, Joseph Smith’s family had to settle in New York on Haudenosaunee lands, so that the Prophet could found the church in the first place.

This interpretation of one of the faith’s central texts fits eerily into placement-era readings of the Book of Mormon. White placement officials and host families under the leadership of Spencer W. Kimball believed that their work would uplift the “Lamanites,” restoring Native people to a knowledge of their “true” roots as descendants of Israelites from the Book of Mormon. After its programs failed to bring about the “Day of the Lamanite”—as Native membership dwindled, or as Indigenous members became less active—the church reframed these late twentieth century teachings to deemphasize the importance of the “Lamanites” and their descendants. Yet, as the church’s 2020 lesson on the Book of Mormon shows, stories of genocide, colonialism, and divinely justified seizures of land continue to play a role in the stories the church tells about its past and the political realities of its present. For as long as the church remains an institution on colonized land, with a central scripture that promises a literal history of the Americas, non-Native Latter-day Saints will wrestle with the meanings of colonialism, falling back on accounts that naturalize their settlement of Indigenous land. Even in 2020, the church struggles to teach Mormon identity without presenting its own triumphalist version of a colonial past.²⁰²

²⁰² For a reflection of how settler colonialism continues to animate white Mormon ceremonies about the past, see Elise Boxer, “‘This is the Place!’ Disrupting Mormon Settler Colonialism,” in *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion*, Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks, eds. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018), 77-99.

As part of this broader project of shaping identity and interpretations of colonialism, placement sought to contest the meaning of Indigeneity among its participants. While the program relates to other twentieth century assimilationist efforts to reform Native children's present by imposing cultural, linguistic, and spiritual changes intended to assimilate them into settler society, placement also nudged its participants to redefine their histories—to see themselves as “Lamanites” in fulfillment of white Saints’ understandings of the past. Some Native Mormons selectively embraced the “Lamanite” category, accepting the message that they might be of “Royal Blood,” or had a uniquely vital role in realizing LDS prophecy, while distancing themselves from the idea that dark skin evidenced a cursed status. Regardless of the category's usefulness to some placement participants, the church went about instilling the identity in less than Saintly ways, removing Native children from their communities and distancing them from the cultures, languages, and Indigenous teachings that had characterized their childhoods up to that point. One of the greatest limitations of this thesis—alongside many scholarly histories of placement so far—is that it relies so heavily on oral histories from former students who chose to remain in the church. This group's perspectives are valuable, but we must also recognize that the majority of placement students left the church, and might therefore recall a more critical version of the program and the “Lamanite” category. Some of the program's most significant abuses have come out only in recent years, with legal challenges and requests for an official apology for harms the program caused.

In 2016, four former placement students filed sexual abuse lawsuits against the church, for crimes dating from 1960 until the early 1980s. The defendants in all cases said they were sexually assaulted on multiple occasions by host family members. Many recalled reaching out to placement caseworkers for help, but the church failed to respond. At the

time, placement social workers received massive caseloads, overseeing sometimes 80 to 90 host families (and possibly even more students).²⁰³ Additionally, placement social workers often encouraged unhappy students to remain on placement, believing that more time on placement would cure any initial discomfort or “culture shock” a student experienced. In one alarming case, a former student said that the caseworker took him out of a home where he faced sexual abuse from an older host brother, only to place him in another household where yet another host brother sexually assaulted him.²⁰⁴ The sexual violence is said to have gone hand in hand with other forms of abuse, as one former student recalled that his host family forcibly had “his mouth washed out with soap whenever he spoke Navajo to the other placement children in the home.”²⁰⁵

For a number of reasons, the former students decided to file their suits in the Navajo Nation, rather than the Utah state courts. First, most of the people the defense might name as assailants had already died well before the case went to trial. And under Utah law, the prosecution could put only individuals on trial—not the church itself. This caveat was especially important, since the former students sought not only restitution for the damages but an apology from the church and structural reform to its sex-abuse policy, which instructs victims of sexual violence to contact a church-run help line before reaching out to

²⁰³ Dale L. Shumway, interviewed by Lilly Fowler. In Fowler, “Why Several Native Americans are Suing the Mormon Church,” *The Atlantic*, October 23, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/10/why-some-native-americans-are-suing-the-mormon-church/504944/>.

²⁰⁴ Kimberly Scott, “Navajo Nation Members Suing LDS Church Over Alleged Childhood Sexual Abuse,” *Associated Press*, June 8, 2016, <https://www.stgeorgeutah.com/news/archive/2016/06/08/kss-navajo-nation-members-suing-lds-church-over-alleged-childhood-sexual-abuse#.X6taYSF7kUt>.

²⁰⁵ “RJ,” interviewed by Fowler, “Why Several Native Americans are Suing.”

authorities. Given their goals and the constraints of Utah law, the students chose to wage this legal battle in the Window Rock District Court in the Navajo Nation.²⁰⁶

The church moved to have the charges dismissed by the US District Court in Utah, on the grounds that the Navajo Nation did not have the authority to rule on the case. LDS legal counsel asserted that because the sexual violence had taken place off the Navajo Nation, Diné courts could not take the case. In response, the Navajo Nation filed a counter to the church's complaint, pointing out that one of the former students had been contacted over the summer (on the Navajo Nation) by a caseworker who encouraged her to move back in with the family that had sexually abused her.²⁰⁷ On these grounds, the US District Court ordered the church to exhaust its remedies in tribal court, at which point the church tried again to have the case dismissed by the Supreme Court of the Navajo Nation. This too backfired. Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne argued that the ruling must continue, as "District Courts have the responsibility to protect sovereignty of the Navajo Nation, and not surrender authority unnecessarily."²⁰⁸

The initial cases encouraged other former placement students to come forward with their stories. By 2018, more than a dozen allegations of sexual abuse in the program had emerged, from members of the Navajo Nation and the Crow Tribe of Montana, with cases in both tribal and state courts.²⁰⁹ However, so far none of the cases has succeeded in

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Elizabeth Hardin-Burrola, "Sex Abuse Lawsuit Filed Against LDS Church," *Gallup Independent*, January 28, 2017, http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news66/2017_01_28_Hardin-Burrola_Sex_abuse.htm.

²⁰⁸ Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a Utah Corporation; LDS Family Services, a Utah Corporation *v.* Window Rock District Court, SC-CV-42-18 (2018), 4.

²⁰⁹ Felicia Fonseca, "'No Admission of Wrongdoing,' Tribal Members Settle Sex Abuse Cases Against LDS Church," *Associated Press*, September 23, 2018,

securing an admission of wrongdoing from the LDS Church, or a change to the institution's sexual abuse policies, which many former students sought in litigation.

These allegations of sexual assault reveal the program's similarities to other 20th century child removal programs, especially the Residential Schools in Canada. The federal government usually forced First Nation students to these boarding schools, which were often run by lay religious organizations. At those institutions, many experienced sexual abuse.²¹⁰ Canada formed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, formally apologizing for the federal government's role in removing Indigenous children and exposing them to harm. The federal government also issued fiscal reparations and created a clear legal pathway to justice for those who had experienced sexual abuse. These reconciliation efforts are imperfect, but all those who survived the residential schools received a formal acknowledgement of wrongdoing from the government and minute steps toward repairing the harm done. Critically, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission served a role in improving public memory of the Residential Schools and ending the silence on the many harmful aspects of Indigenous child removal.²¹¹

What would it look like if the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints attempted a similar reconciliation, by acknowledging wrongdoing for its role in removing Indigenous children and exposing them to harm? For one thing, this might help to jumpstart a public conversation on placement and other colonial aspects of LDS history. The recent sexual abuse allegations represent just one damaging aspect of the program, but the church should

<https://www.stgeorgeutah.com/news/archive/2018/09/23/apc-no-admission-of-wrongdoing-tribal-members-settle-sex-abuse-cases-against-lds-church/#.X6tkxiF7kUt>.

²¹⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "The Survivors Speak: A Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," 153-164.

²¹¹ Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 6.

also address the program's role in severing Native families and seeking to replace Indigenous lifeways with white Mormon ones. This could be a key first step for the church in acknowledging the grievances of Native people anywhere the Saints settled in North America—communities where white Latter-day Saints have played an outsized role in displacing Native people, removing and indoctrinating their children, and disenfranchising them.²¹²

Efforts to address the church's role in Indigenous child removal would also help to reverse the erasure of placement from the public memory of settler members. For a program that ended two decades ago, few young, white Latter-day Saints are aware of the program's existence, since they cannot directly recall a time when many public schools in Mormon country had at least a few placement students. In the church's cultural and religious capital of Utah, state history courses do not even cover the Indian Student Placement Program, nor do LDS Seminary classes offered at most Utah high schools. Instead, many white LDS youth learn mythologized versions of the past through celebrations like "Pioneer Day," a Utah holiday commemorating the invasion of Mormon settlers into the Great Basin in 1847. The celebration is just one part of settler forgetting in Utah, which emphasizes rugged, versatile "pioneers" fleeing religious persecution while obscuring their role in displacing, indenturing, and removing Native people. Placement is an especially helpful way to push back on the

²¹² Margaret Jacobs has shown how Mormon child removal efforts not only furnished children for placement, but that the Relief Society and LDS Social Services removed an unknown number of Indigenous children for more permanent foster arrangements. See Jacobs, "Entangled Histories: The Mormon Church and Indigenous Child Removal from 1850 to 2000," *Journal of Mormon History* 42 no. 2 (2016): 46-51; see also Jared Farmer, "Crossroads of the West," *Journal of Mormon History* 41 no. 1 (January 2015): 160, for a brief but excellent discussion of the role of the church in colonial violence against Indigenous people; for a history relevant to the particularly contested Diné-Mormon relations in San Juan County, see Robert S. McPherson, *The Navajo Northern Frontier 1860-1900: Expansion Through Adversity* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2001).

LDS “pioneer” mythos, because it ties contemporary forms of settler amnesia to the earlier, more direct colonial forms of genocide and land theft.

Scholarly conversations would also benefit from greater focus on placement. As Margaret Jacobs has shown, the history of Indigenous child removal in the postwar world exposes similarities in the way that settler colonial nation states (and settler religious organizations) interacted with Indigenous populations, whose existence challenged the legitimacy of settler land claims.²¹³ Placement fits in well within this story, demonstrating on one hand the harmful effects of well-intentioned, colorblind liberal “reforms” on Native families, and the activism of Native people in ending child removal practices. As I argued earlier, more work on placement is needed in order to fully grasp the program’s most coercive and devastating aspects. Yet writing a critical history of placement will continue to be an enormous challenge so long as the majority of documents on the ISPP remain unavailable for non-member scholars to access. The church should not only offer a statement of wrongdoing, but it should work toward creating more welcoming archives (or, at the very least, remove all obstructions to documents in the public interest).

Placement had the greatest impact on Indigenous communities, especially the Navajo Nation. In Diné Bikéyah in the 1980s, an estimated one out of every twelve people would have gone on placement sometime in their lifetimes.²¹⁴ As the third chapter of this thesis has shown, the Navajo Nation also played a considerable role in halting placement and other

²¹³ Margaret Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

²¹⁴ David Albrecht, interviewed by Matthew Garrett, in Garrett, *Making Lamanites: Mormons, Native Americans, and the Indian Student Placement Program, 1947-2000* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 235.

Indigenous child removal movements, and today Diné courts continue to hold the LDS Church accountable for the harm former students experienced in white Mormon homes.

Placement's architects believed that their program would send its participants home to their natal communities as leaders and missionaries, converting the people around them to LDS belief systems. Kimball, Buchanan, and others believed that a "Day of the Lamanite" would arrive—a day when placement was no longer needed because Native people had conformed to the expectations of white settler modernity. In 2000, placement ended, but a more complex reality emerged. Some participants took what they needed from the program, others exercised their autonomy by leaving the program and church entirely, but ultimately the Indigenous people the church sought to uplift chose their own paths forward. They had survived settler invasions and genocide, escaped the jaws of indenture, and weathered the years of removal and placement.

APPENDIX

PLACEMENT STUDENTS BY NATION OR TRIBE IN 1967

TABLE 6

NUMBER OF STUDENT PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLACEMENT PROGRAM ACCORDING TO TRIBAL AFFILIATION

SOUTHWESTERN STATES		NORTH CENTRAL STATES	
Navajo	1002	Sioux	57
Apache	58	Assiniboine	17
Hopi	51	Oglala Sioux	4
Hualapai	19	Rosebud Sioux	4
Pima	24	Gros Ventre	12
Papago	3	Assiniboine-Sioux	7
Zuni	9	Santee	2
Supai	3	Hedista-Mandan	1
Acoma	7	Crow	31
Laguna	10	Crow-Cheyenne	2
Tewa	5	Crow-Gros Ventre	1
Laguna-Zia	2	Cheyenne	24
Total Southwestern States	1193	Arapahoe	2
NORTHWESTERN STATES		Chippewa	16
Cayuse	3	Chippewa-Sioux	2
Cayuse-Walla-Walla	2	Chippewa-Cree-Assin.	3
Lummi	2	Shoshone	14
Tulalip	2	Blackfeet	2
Yakima	3	Omaha	12
Snohomish	2	Winnebago	7
Guillayuet	4	Total North Central States	220
Muckleshoot	2	CANADA	
Spanish American	2	Peigan	13
Total Northwestern States	22	Coldwater Band	3
SOUTHERN UTAH (Paiute)		Stony	6
20		Ahouset	6
UINTAH-OURAY		Shulus	3
11		Blackfoot	11
OKLAHOMA		Kwaguti	3
Wichita-Cheyenne	1	Haida	13
Sioux-Cheyenne	1	Blood	30
Choctaw	2	Sechart	1
Choctaw-Ponca	1	Opetchesaht	1
Kiowa	3	Cree	1
Kowa-Caddo	1	Okangan	1
Apache-Mexican	1	Assiniboine	1
Total Oklahoma	10	Total Canada	93
GRAND TOTAL		1569	

Source: Clarence R. Bishop, "Indian Placement: A History of the Indian Student Placement Program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1967, 97, HBLL.

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